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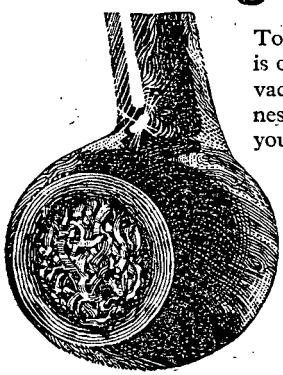

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ARGOSY

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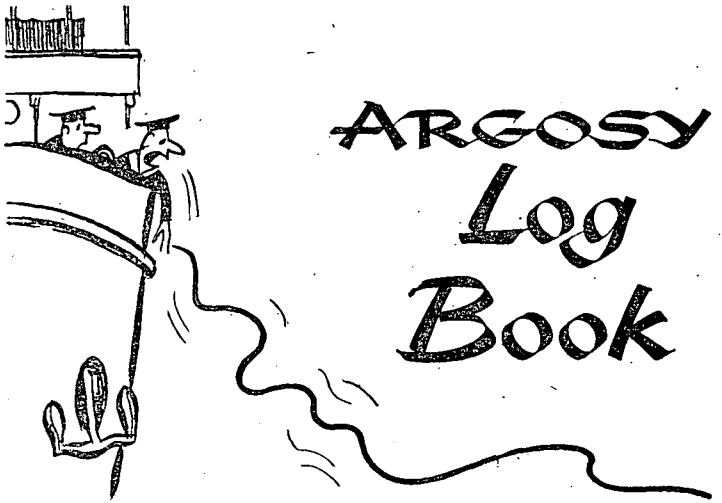

IT is an acknowledged fact that nothing is simpler than keeping a wife in every port; all you need is a card index, a sociable nature, and a collection of loyal and trusty shipmates.

Not so easy the lot of the sailor who belongs to a library in every port. He is in a constant state of fret, either because the old hulk has developed engine-trouble or run into fog and got stuck in mid Atlantic; meanwhile the twopences are ticking up inexorably; or else the white cliffs of Dover are poking into view while he is still feverishly getting through the last quarter of *Round the Universe in Eighty Million Light-Years.* Ace Jackson the daredevil space-erk is still a million light-years from base, and our poor hero sits about, madly turning over two pages at once while the ship has to dock herself without him.

It would be better to buy a copy of Argosy in every port.

We're always anxious to know which kind of fiction our readers like best: thriller, comedy, romance, science fiction, ghost story, fantasy, straight adventure, or the "problem story." We're asking you this month to think over the stories you've just read in this issue—they represent most of the types named above—list the story titles in your order of preference on a postcard and send it by August 10 to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London, E.C.4. There will be a two-guinea prize for the list that most nearly represents the choice of the majority.

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Walter de la Mare: what a lot of magic his name evokes. Already he has become a legend in his own right. He has been much in the news since the celebrations of his eighty-third birthday in April, which included a de la Mare exhibition at the National Book League. His literary output has been enormous; he has written novels, plays, criticism, and produced some well-loved anthologies. Readers won't need to be reminded of *Memoirs of a Midget*, *Peacock Pie*, *The Listeners* . . . Undoubtedly he is best known for his poetry, much of it hauntingly familiar, and for his stories: particularly his ghost stories. If there *is* a reader who has not yet read one of these, now is the moment for him to turn to page 83, enter de la Mare country, and meet the disturbingly real inmates of that dreamlike world.

In the rustling silence of the British Museum Reading Room there may be strange tensions building—or so **John P. Marquand** suggests in *I'll Never Forget*, his complete, and completely breathtaking novel which begins on page 112. Marquand is one of America's most distinguished writers and likes to turn a satirical eye on New England in his novels, *The Late George*

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Apley, for instance, and *Wickford Point*. He also writes thrillers; his Mr. Moto mystery stories are well known.

Paul Gallico is an old friend of Argosy and in his new story *Hush Puppy* he reintroduces another old friend—Monsieur Bonneval, culinary hero of *Chicken Surprise*, which we printed in 1954. This time Gallico's resourceful innkeeper perpetrates a gastronomic *double entendre* about which the only possible comment is Hot Dog!

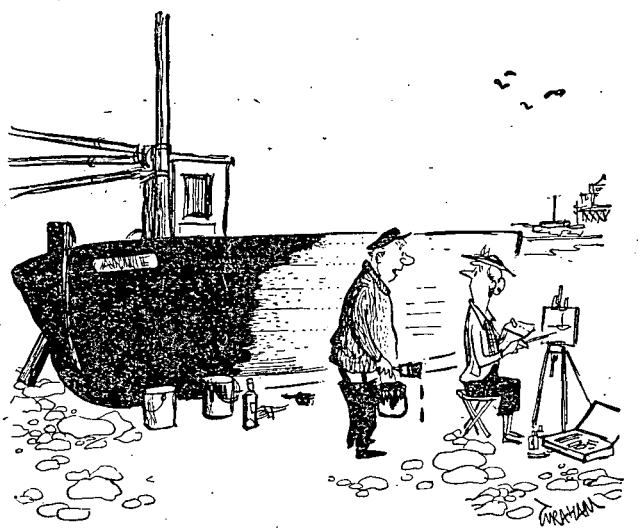
Kem Bennett had some high old times in World War II, parachuting twice into Occupied France. Now he lives by writing, brave man! His Argosy story *Queer Fish* was filmed last year. A trip to Spain inspired his new story.

Prizes—On page 90 we print the prize-winning letters from our May competition. Prizes of two guineas each go to :

Miss E. M. Russell, Bancroft Avenue, East Finchley, N.2
Squadron Leader J. Holt, M.B.E., Angel House, Islington, N.1
Mrs. A. V. Dodkins, Lanarca, Cyprus
George Underhill, Esq., Bosbury Road, Malvern
Mrs. Irene Mason, Court Lane, Erdington, Birmingham

Watch out next month for the " Think of a Title " winners.

JOHN SILVER



Might I borrow a little turps?

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FULL FATHOM FIVE

Down went Amanda's heart
into her flippered feet

BY KEM BENNETT

THE old man was long, thin, and bent, with a face like a freakish rock formation, and a terrible squint. He wore the baggy black trousers and cummerbund of the Catalan fisherman. His trousers were rolled up to the knees, displaying calves that appeared to have been knitted in old rope on large needles. His feet must have been more leathery than any blacksmith's apron because he was hopping about from rock to rock and in and out of the pools, paying absolutely no attention to encrustations of barnacles that would have turned an ordinary foot into hamburger steak in less than a minute.

When Edward arrived he stopped hacking limpets off the rocks with a worn kitchen knife and sat down to watch.

Edward was used to an audience. Aqualungs were not so common on the Costa Brava that the sight of someone using one attracted no attention. A few minutes later, having kitted himself up, he eased himself off a rock and was gone with a slithery splash, leaving behind him a trail of bubbles rising through the clear water.

The old man rolled a cigarette of Spanish tabaco negro, which lives up to its name, took a battered cigarette-holder from the pocket of his faded shirt, and sat and smoked, as still as a gargoyle that some unemployed monumental mason might have hacked out of the rock for a pastime.

Below, Edward was playing the waiting game that pays off best in underwater photography. Speed, noise, bustle—all these things have the same effect, which is to cause half the inhabitants to make off rapidly in search of peace and quiet while the other half retire to nooks and crannies in the rocks, slam the doors, and wait until the noisy invader runs out of air.

While he waited, poised in the water, camera at the ready, Edward was thinking. He found that the peace and loneliness of the underwater scene always helped him to think. He was thinking about money.

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The British Government, still committed to rationing the amount of foreign currency that they permitted their nationals to use abroad, was not going to let him have any more pesetas than he possessed at the moment—enough for only a few more days in Sa Falconera. Not, that is, unless he chose to return to England, apply to his bank manager for a large green form, and apply to the Bank of England for a professional allowance, giving his reasons at length and in triplicate. Even then, it was possible that the Bank of England would decide no dice—and besides, there were the travel expenses to think about.

So it looked as if his *Underwater Guide to the Spanish Coast* would not be completed that year. Pity, too, because well-heeled skin-divers of all nationalities were flocking to the Costa Brava and the Balearic Islands, and an underwater guide, published at fifteen shillings, say, had looked to Edward to be a Good Thing, liable to earn him a sizeable wodge of potatoes.

He sighed, expelling a cloud of bubbles larger than usual from the duck-bill valve behind his head and causing a coy little female octopus to duck back into cover just as she had been about to consent to pose.

From money, Edward's thoughts turned to Amanda, his dearly beloved and staggeringly beautiful wife. They frequently followed this course, because Amanda's attitude to money was less than Spartan. She believed in chucking it about. Already on this trip she had acquired a tweed suit—" They make them so beautifully, darling, and so *cheap*! "—a leather jacket, a couple of silly hats, a glass thing for drinking wine out of, and a decorated game-bag which she swore she was going to carry in Paris and start a new fashion.

Dear Amanda. Damn Amanda! If she thought she was going to have that crazy necklace out of the boutique in Tossa, she was mistaken! After all, there was a limit. He was not . . .

The octopus re-emerged from her apartment. Edward froze. Click, went the shutter of his camera. Click, click, click.

A few minutes later, starting to feel chilly and having used up what remained of his film on the octopus, he surfaced close to the rock where he had left his clothes. He found himself staring straight into the squint of the old man who had been collecting limpets. He recoiled. Then, remembering his manners, spat out his mouthpiece, smiled, and said, " Buenos días."

The old man answered in Catalan, Castilian's ugly sister, gravel-voiced and hoarse as a Chicago barman. " Bon día," he growled, and then he went away.

Edward and Amanda were sitting outside the one and only bar

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in Sa Falconera—which was also the one and only shop. They were drinking a succulent mixture of Spanish brandy and café espresso and thinking about England where a single brandy fetched the price of a bottle in Spain.

" Thursday? " Amanda queried.

" Thursday," Edward agreed. " And at that we shan't have enough scratch for more than one night in France, which'll mean driving till our eyes stand out like chapel hat-pegs."

" Oh well," said Amanda, " we've had three months of it, after all. Mustn't be greedy. Besides, I've got a lovely tan."

" Beautiful," Edward leered. " Why do you have to cover up so much of it? We could have stayed a week longer for the price of that damn jacket."

" If you like," Amanda said grimly, " I'll take my clothes off *now* and sell them."

She might have done, at that. Edward shook his head violently. " No, Amanda darling, please. I'm sorry. I take the crack back. I'm—I'm *glad* you bought the jacket."

" That's better."

There was a young man standing beside their table. He was as natty as a tom-cat, in a violet shirt and his Sunday suit which was the colour of stickjaw toffee. He had a large bony hand laid on the back of the spare chair and when Edward glanced at him, he smiled, and said, " With your permission, señor? "

Edward knew him vaguely by sight. " Yes," he said in Spanish. " Please. Help yourself." And at the same time he recognized the family resemblance; this was the son of the old man of the rocks. The boy had not inherited the squint, but the bone was there, and in thirty years he, too, would have a face like a length of driftwood.

" You are the famous diver, señor? "

" I dive," Edward admitted, pleased. " Not professionally, just for fun."

" My father sent me to say that he desires to speak to you, señor."

" Why did he not speak to me on the rocks this morning? " Edward asked. " It was he, was it not? "

The boy pulled a face which demonstrated that he was intolerant of the deficiencies of the aged. " Yes, but it makes him sweat to speak Castilian, señor. If you care to come I could interpret."

" I told you, I'm not a professional diver."

The young man leered and shrugged his toffee-brown shoulders.

Edward glanced at Amanda. She had taken off her sunglasses and was sucking the end of one of the ear pieces. There was a light in her eyes, and he thought that it resembled the

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glitter of a certain fantaisie necklace in Tossa. "Now—" he began, but she was ahead of him.

"Is there money in this proposition?"

The boy looked at her sideways. It was evident that she affected him strongly. His eyes devoured the short, curly, very fair hair, the eyes, blue as the sea and deeper, the red zest of the mouth. And her body, which lived up to all the promises of eyes and hair and lips. He swallowed, smiled, nodded eagerly. "Much money, señora. A fortune. Please believe me."

"Tell us more," Amanda said sweetly.

The boy glanced right, then left, shook his head, leaned forward conspiratorially. "Not here." He put his hand behind a protuberant ear and made it wag in a most suggestive fashion. "Tonight, señora, if you will be so gracious. At our house; it is the one at the far end of the beach."

"We'll be there," Amanda said. "Ssh, darling!"

When the boy had gone, Edward let loose his umbrage: "Look, if you think I'm going grubbing around in the mud for an anchor the old goat lost a couple of years ago, you're wrong! From now until Thursday I'm going to be in the water all day, taking photographs that will maybe tempt a publisher into coming through with a contract. I—"

"No harm in knowing what the proposition is, darling," Amanda pointed out.

"No, but—"

"But what?"

"I've seen the old thug. You haven't. He looks like an underfed vulture. Furthermore, he has the most abominable squint, and that's bad luck."

"It isn't," Amanda said. "It's muscles."

"All right!" Edward said. "All right, but from now on I do the deciding, see? I'm the mug that risks the air embolisms and the bends, so *I'm* the one that says what's what. D'you hear me?"

"Yes, darling," Amanda said sweetly, and he glowered at her, doing painful things to her in his imagination which were denied to him outside the Bar Patxei on a Sunday afternoon.

That night the four of them sat with grave formality round the big kitchen table in the old man's house. Garlic, onions, and dried tomatoes hung in strings beside the charcoal range. The floor was of earth-red tiles, uncarpeted, and the chairs were small and hard.

They were drinking a vino corriente which was so young and muscular that it left the tongue feeling like a sheepskin boot.

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" In 1943," Isidro, the son, was saying, " an English spy came in a submarine. El Papa was asked to pick him up in his boat, offshore, and because we in Catalonia were always very strong for the Allied cause, he agreed. Unfortunately, they were betrayed. There were soldiers waiting at the landing-place. Shots were fired and the Englishman got perforated." He paused, making a sorrowfully sympathetic gesture which said, as well, that he thought espionage was a mug's game.

" All right," Edward said calmly. " Go on. What next? "

" El Papa managed to make an escape. When the first shot was fired—into reverse, *brooum* with the motor, and away, you understand? "

Edward frowned. Amanda nodded. Her hands were cupped under her chin and her eyes were shining. Drama. Meat and drink.

" In the boat were left all the poor gentleman's belongings. The usual things and, as well, a black box. What do you think the box contained? "

" Gold? " Edward queried.

Isidro slapped himself on the forehead. " Caray! " he said. " The señor has second sight."

" What happened to the gold? "

" It was thrown overboard together with everything that might have betrayed the fact that the spy had been in the boat."

Amanda said huskily, " Thrown overboard? " She looked at El Papa. " Is the old man mad? "

" Not mad," Isidro said apologetically. " He was frightened, and the other man in the boat, who is now dead—may he be with God—he too was frightened. They threw all overboard without thinking."

" You know where the gold lies? " Edward asked.

" Sí, señor. The exact place. We have been waiting for thirteen years." Isidro glanced at his father.

" True," the old man growled, nodding his head hard enough to break his neck. " Before God! Upon my life."

" How deep? "

" Six, seven, maybe eight metres," Isidro replied. " Upon my oath it is not more. If you will go down for the gold, señor, my father is prepared to give you much of it. A third, say . . ."

Amanda's voice cut in. " Half," she said demurely. " Fifty-fifty—not a duro less."

The following afternoon they chugged up the coast in El Papa's boat, having made obvious and public arrangements to go fishing beforehand. In under an hour they came to a diminutive beach cowering beneath perpendicular cliffs whose one aim

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seemed to be to push it into the water. There were reefs about, sometimes sticking their ugly heads above water, with deep gulfs and gullies between them. El Papa sidled the boat in among the rocks with complete confidence.

Presently he stopped the boat and, for once, he smiled.

"Gold!" he said, pointing downwards, and cut off half of his squint with a wink so wicked that it made Amanda jump.

Edward was looking at the beach. So that was where a British agent had met a quick and treacherous end, poor devil. Or had he? Something was telling Edward that during the last war agents had never entered Spain the hard way, but had travelled self-righteously to Madrid on diplomatic passports. Hmm. Could El Papa be lying? Or demented? Looking at him, one was forced to the conclusion that he could be—either or both. And yet . . . gold . . . treasure trove . . . yellow bars of wealth . . . money to stay on and finish his guide.

It had to be tried; he would never forgive himself if he didn't have one quick look. Neither, for that matter, would Amanda ever forgive him. Her nostrils were flaring. She looked like a thoroughbred waiting for the starting-gate to go up. Hell, she looked good in that sun-dress!

Flippers on. Mask on. Before he had time to stick the aqualung mouthpiece between his teeth, Amanda leaned out, bent sideways, and kissed him warmly on the lips.

"Cupboard love," he said. "It won't be there, my pet. It's a hundred to one it won't be there."

"I know . . . but just suppose it was!"

"Yes," he said, "I know. I love you, even if you do have the soul of an Armenian. Hasta pronto."

The bubbles wandered upwards. Edward's rhythmically kicking flippers drove him down into the blue-black inkiness of water in shadow. He disturbed a large moray eel which showed its teeth at him like a terrier. Rock fish of all colours, shapes, and sizes darted frantically for cover. A lugubrious grouper stared at him as if he were the undertaker come to measure Auntie Mabel.

Trying not to think of all the pictures he was missing, Edward systematically searched the gullies in the vicinity. In the fifth or sixth, he found the box.

It was quite big, the size of an ordinary suitcase, perhaps. Big, black, neat—and new-looking. Edward sat down on a nearby rock, looking first for sea-urchins as carefully as a schoolboy checking for bent pins. He stared at the black box. Thirteen years in the water, and yet there was no marine growth on the exterior. Could it be, perhaps, that there was a rat about to be smelt by any character with a sense of self-preservation?

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He swam over and laid hands on the box. The outer covering was of rubberized fabric. He hefted the thing—quite light. And very new. Gold? Gold, be jiggered!

Up he went, his flippers kicking angrily. On the surface, he swopped his aqualung mouthpiece for that of a schnorkel to save air, and swam towards El Papa's boat.

They were all leaning eagerly over the side. Amanda said, "Well? did you found—I mean find it? Say something before I go pop!"

Edward spat out his mouthpiece, one hand on the boat's gunwale. "I found a box." He looked hard at El Papa. The old man's face was as expressionless as a locked front door. Isidro, on the other hand, was looking embarrassed, even furtive. "It was very light," Edward added.

"Perhaps," Isidro suggested brightly, "the money was in notes, after all?"

"Furthermore, it was as clean as if it had been in the water for a day or a week, not thirteen years."

"Ah."

"Ask your father what was in it," Edward said coolly. "Go on! Ask him. Was it cigarettes, drugs, scent, or what? And don't give me the stuff about paper money, because I'm not a fool."

El Papa and his son conferred. Hubble-bubble-yak-yak-yak. Edward waited, then intervened. "Look," he said, "there never was a spy, was there—or any gold? You dropped that lot with a Spanish customs launch on your tail, didn't you? And you thought that once I'd fished it up for you I'd keep quiet for fear of getting involved with the police? Well, you're out of luck, Papa mio. I'm not a mug. I'll be damned if I fish up your loot for you!"

Isidro was glumly translating. In short order the old man cut him off. He had understood; talking was El Papa's trouble, not listening.

Edward started to heave himself into the boat. El Papa promptly pushed him back. Amanda said, "Lay off, you old goat."

"I think you had better bring up the box, señor," Isidro said sorrowfully. "If not, I fear El Papa might wish to leave you here."

Edward snarled, "Go to hell! Amanda, give me a hand."

She started to. Isidro took her by the shoulder and pulled her back. She hit him a back-handed swipe that sent him base-over-apex into the bows of the boat. The boat rocked. Amanda nearly fell into the sea. Not El Papa, though; he might well

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have been born in a boat, for he appeared to be welded to this one. As Edward made his third attempt to climb inboard, the old man tapped him smartly on the head with the butt-end of an oar.

"Hell!" Edward said and went down. Fairy lights before the eyes. Whirligigs and celestial formations. Spiral nebulae cavorting through space at a million miles a second. But instinctively he had held his breath. As he sank he crammed his mouthpiece between his lips, and presently twisted his body into a right-handed spin in order to expel water from the aqualung's air-tube. Then he inhaled gratefully. His head ached. He looked up furiously at the underbelly of El Papa's boat, wishing he had a drill, or a bomb, or something. The old goat!

What now? Go up again? And collect another whack on the head? Not perishing likely! Stay down, then? Yes, he decided. That was it, stay down until he had had time to think . . .

In the boat Amanda was fighting to free herself from El Papa, who had her locked in his wiry old arms. "Let me go! let me go, you old fool! You've killed him! Please, please let me go and I might be able to save him."

Isidro was rubbing the side of his face where Amanda's antique wedding-ring had made a painful abrasion. "If I were you I should let her go," he said gloomily in Catalan.

Amanda felt El Papa's arms relax a little. She jerked herself free. "If he's dead," she said, "you'll hang—both of you." Then she took off her clothes, and went over the side wearing a spare face-mask, a schnorkel breathing-tube, and a pair of flippers.

Blue and dim, alien and mysterious the water was, and Amanda thought of Edward lying limply among the weed-covered rocks in a hostile and clammy world. She started to cry and the tears were trapped in her mask, making a little pool that flowed backwards and forwards over the glass as she turned her head.

There was no sign of him, dead or alive. Down went poor Amanda's heart into her flippered feet. She swam in a slowly widening circle, straining her eyes to penetrate the misty blueness below. Inside her head, the voice of Amanda the Good was making frantic vows: I'll never do it again, darling. I'll never be casual about money, I'll never get you into escapades by talking too much, I'll never again use your love for blackmail. I'm a pig, I know, but I do love you like anything, so please, please don't be dead . . .

Then, suddenly, in the distance, she caught the glint of silver bubbles rising. Her heart leapt. The blood pulsed in her veins and she turned and swam for dear life towards them.

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Edward was sitting at ease on a rock six feet below the surface, his legs crossed, writing busily on an aluminium plate that he kept attached to the harness of his aqualung in order to be able to make photographic notes under water. He looked as prim and preoccupied as an elderly secretary in a city office, and Amanda wanted to laugh.

When she was a few feet away from him, trying to smile with her eyes to let him know that she loved him dearly and was overwhelmed with joy to see him alive, he held up the plate. She found that she was able to read the message easily. DON'T LET ON YOU'VE SEEN ME, it said in large capital letters. WE MUST TALK. SWIM ROUND AND SURFACE BEHIND THIS ROCK OUT OF SIGHT OF THE BOAT.

Amanda swam back to El Papa's boat. Looking hangdog, they helped her over the side.

She faced them. " He's dead. I saw his body on the bottom. It was too deep for me to reach without a breathing-apparatus. It will have to be brought up by a diver."

Isidro stared down at his hands. El Papa took off his beret and scratched his head. Then, as if someone had fired a starting-gun, they burst into argument. Isidro was accusatory; El Papa was sourly defiant.

When the futile argument had spent itself they turned back to Amanda. She had dressed. She was sitting in the bows of the boat, staring out to sea, her face a mask of pathos, her hands aimlessly playing with Edward's harpoon-gun which had been lying nearby.

El Papa scratched his nose. " We had better kill her too," he said in Catalan.

Isidro said, " You are mad, old man! She is too beautiful."

" Bah! Grow up, boy. She can send us to the garrotte."

" We shall go anyway," Isidro said dismally. " It is known that we took them out."

" If we kill her we can say that they both drowned."

" Who will believe us? " Isidro turned to Amanda, his eyes pleading. " It was an accident, señora. We are truly sorry. Before God, my father did not mean to kill the poor señor. He hit him very, very gently with the oar."

" He killed him," Amanda said huskily. " I expect you are thinking of killing me too." Isidro jumped. " If you come near me I shall harpoon you," Amanda continued. " Now let us go back to Sa Falconera."

El Papa stared at the harpoon-gun. It was loaded; five minutes earlier it had not been. The five-foot-long rod of

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chrome-steel had an evil-looking trident screwed to the business end. He scowled. "No!"

"Yes!" said Amanda.

"Yes," said Isidro. "Be reasonable, father."

El Papa pulled a sour face and bent to crank the engine.

Puff-puff-puff. The boat moved, but very slowly. Amanda settled the harpoon-gun on her knee, keeping the trident pointed straight at El Papa's solar plexus. El Papa looked at the gun, looked at the wake, opened the throttle with the big toe of his bare left foot. *Puff-puff-puff!* The power made a little difference, but not much.

"See if we have weed," El Papa said to Isidro, staring at the minuscule bow wave as if it was doing him an injury.

Isidro peered over the stern, looking down into the foaming water as El Papa throttled down. "No weed."

El Papa looked at the propellor for himself. He kicked the engine-housing with a dirty foot. "Sour the milk! A nanny-goat could pull better."

Amanda's face was still a mask of tragedy. Her gun hand was steady, though. El Papa looked at her carefully, scratching the side of his nose and squinting furiously. She leaned suddenly forward and gave him a sharp little dig in the ribs with the trident. "No tricks, Papa," she said menacingly. "Why aren't we going faster?"

Papa reached for his Castilian. "Don't know," he said. "Does the señora?"

"Of course I don't know, you old ape! Just keep moving, that's all. If we stop I'm going to press the trigger."

"Yes," Isidro said anxiously. "Don't worry, we shall get to Sa Falconera, even if it does take a little longer."

"We'd better," Amanda said.

On the beach at Sa Falconera a crowd had quickly gathered. Six fishermen, ten fishermen's wives, twenty children, five dogs, six tourists, and a Corporal of the Civil Guard.

"It was an accident, Lieutenant," Amanda was saying to the Corporal. "While my husband was getting into the boat the old man hit him by mistake with an oar he was using to keep us off the rocks. The blow must have stunned him because he sank and never came up again. I . . . I saw his body on the bottom. Will you please recover it for me?"

Isidro's eyes were moist with gratitude. He dug El Papa in the ribs. "She said it was an accident."

El Papa tore his eyes from his boat, beached nearby. "Sour the milk," he said. "I wonder why."

The Civil Guard Corporal was a sentimental man. "Of course,

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señora," he was saying to Amanda with a sob in his voice, "but how, if the poor gentleman lies at the bottom of the sea?"

"In Tossa there are others who possess diving-apparatus. Will you not take a boat and ask help of one of them?"

The Corporal beamed. Action. A task to be performed. "Instantly, señora," he said, bringing his hand to the salute in front of his shiny patent-leather hat. He turned to the watching fishermen. "Launch a boat! Don't stand there like a row of amputated legs! Launch a boat! Whose is the fastest?"

"El Papa's," somebody said.

"No, it isn't," El Papa growled. "Not today—for some reason."

Discussion. Pedro's was the next fastest but its engine was under repair. Manoel's was nippy, but then it was small. Sebastian's could move, if bullied, and it was larger . . .

"Launch Sebastian's," the Corporal barked. He turned. "You and you!" Isidro and El Papa stared at him nervously. "You are both under arrest until this matter is settled. You will come with us to show us the place of the fatality."

El Papa said humbly, "If it please Your Excellency, I wish to attend to my boat. May I . . ."

"Your filth of a boat can wait," said the Corporal. "Help with the launching."

"It would take only an instant."

"Putrefaction!" the Corporal bellowed. "Did you not hear, old goat? I said it could wait! You are under arrest. Do as you're told or you'll rot in the cooler for a month of Sundays."

"Yes," said El Papa. He turned to look at Amanda with a mixture of suspicion and fury abetting his squint. "Will you wish to come, señora?"

She shook her head, silently, piteously. The crowd murmured. *Pobreta! Qué lástima!* To lose such a husband in the prime of life. *Caramba!*

A tear left the corner of Amanda's right eye and ran down her cheek. She bowed her head, and her shoulders shook.

An English lady, motherly as an outsize in corsets, stepped forward from the ranks of the tourists. She put her arm about Amanda's shoulders, propelling her gently up the beach in the direction of the hotel. "What you want is a nice cup of tea, dear. Just you come with me."

"Damned if it doesn't look to me as if she's laughing," a male tourist said, but his wife tugged indignantly at his arm. "Ssh, Henry. Don't be insensitive."

In Tossa de Mar, ten kilometres down the coast, the Corporal

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made inquiries and invited, through an interpreter, a young Frenchman who owned an aqualung to come and search for the dead body of an Englishman. The Frenchman was delighted. He put himself—and his skill—at the service of the police and of humanity, he said.

On the way back to San Antoni and beyond, to the place where Edward's body was presumed to lie, the young Frenchman stood dramatically in the bows of the boat, staring keenly forward with the dagger-like glance of a hero.

It was dusk before they sighted the little beach, and the sea had been getting stronger, now and again flirting the white handkerchief of its spray over the weather side of the rocks. Edward saw the boat coming and slid, with a sigh of relief, into the water. He had been suffering from the evening chill and a shortage of cigarettes and alcohol.

The boat anchored under El Papa's directions. The young Frenchman busied himself. He dusted his naked body with talcum powder preparatory to inserting himself into a sponge-rubber suit. He laid out his overcomplicated equipment with the precision of a fanatically tidy man. He delivered a lecture in French on its use to the crew of the boat, who were fascinated but understood not a word.

Meanwhile, without fuss, Edward surfaced close to the bows of the boat. Isidro saw him first and let out a high-pitched wail that sounded like a pig being killed.

In Sa Falconera, as soon as it was reasonably dark, Amanda left her bedroom in the pension. She was wearing black slacks and a black sweater, and as she went down the beach she was almost invisible against the background of the purple sea.

When she reached El Papa's boat she stooped, feeling in the sand close to the stern. She soon found what she was looking for—a length of thin, strong line which was a thing without which Edward never dived. The line ran down over the beach and into the water. Amanda started to pull it in—gently, hand-over-hand—all the time listening and watching to make sure that the beach was deserted.

Presently a black shape appeared in the shallows. Soundlessly whistling a happy little tune, Amanda patted the side of the boat affectionately. Then she cut the line and went up the beach with the black box in her hands. She went round the back of the pension and up to her room by the service stairs . . .

In Sebastian's boat Edward was explaining. "I must have lost count of time. After all, I was hit on the head, wasn't I? I don't remember. I was examining some conches I found and

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then it struck me that it was remarkably dark for mid afternoon, so I surfaced—and there you all were."

"You have half an hour's air in your bottles," the young Frenchman interrupted acidly. "How could you have stayed submerged for more than three hours? Answer me, how could you have breathed air from your cylinders for three hours or more, conscious or unconscious?"

Edward smiled sweetly at him. "I seem to have done something miraculous," he murmured. "Perhaps I was in a coma and didn't breathe at all. They say that Indian mystics can live without breathing."

"I disgorge myself of Indian mystics," the Frenchman shouted. "It is ridiculous! It is a trick! It is a silly English joke." He went away to sulk in the bows of the boat.

The Corporal of the Guardia Civil was more credulous and less critical.

"Fantástico!" he said, shaking Edward warmly by the hand. "A miraculous deliverance, señor. One can see that the blessed saints were with you. Please accept my congratulations."

"Thank you," Edward said. "You don't happen to have a cigarette on you, I suppose?"

In Sa Falconera there was a reunion. Amanda threw herself at Edward and hugged him, her shoulders shaking violently, and the onlookers whispered to one another approvingly. It was nice to see a proper emotion displayed. Edward then drank two or three glasses of brandy and shook hands with the entire population, less El Papa and Isidro, who were missing.

Eventually, Edward and Amanda managed to escape to their room. Amanda was bubbling. "Oh boy!" she said, "did we put it over those two cannibals!"

"I take it we have the loot," Edward said happily. "What was in the box?"

"I didn't have time to look, darling. It's in the wardrobe."

Edward fetched the black box from the wardrobe. With a razor blade he slit open the rubberized-fabric covering. The container inside was of aluminium. He broke the seals and lifted the lid.

"Oh!" said Amanda broken-heartedly.

Edward had a small cardboard carton in his hand. He was smiling. "What do you mean—oh?"

"Well—films!".

"*Colour* film, my sweet," Edward said. "Quite another matter. The price is bad enough at home, but at Palafrugell it's astronomic. I know, because I bought some the other day. There are no flies on El Papa, my pet."

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Amanda was lying on the bed, her hands clasped behind her head and her eyes shining.

"We have absolutely no right to keep them, you know," Edward said.

"No." The shine in Amanda's eyes faded.

He frowned. "Do you mean to tell me you wouldn't have my liver out if I were to surrender them?"

"No," Amanda said gravely. "When I was afraid you had bought it this afternoon, I made a vow I'd never talk you into doing anything you didn't want to again. I meant it."

Edward sat down on the bed beside her. "But I don't *want* to surrender them, darling," he said plaintively. "Besides, hereabouts smuggling is almost an honest trade . . . almost."

"Yes."

"Hmm," said Edward, scratching his nose. "Think of the tourists we'd bring to Spain by publishing an underwater guide. Why, the State would probably make thousands out of it!" He looked at her and added, "You looked very pretty in the water."

"Did I, Edward?"

"I love you, Amanda."

"I love you too, Edward."

He grinned. "There are ear-rings to go with that necklace, you know; I saw them under the counter."

Amanda put her arms round him. "Darling," she said. "Darling, darling, darling . . ." Then she chuckled. "Oaf! this is the one that unzips at the back."

On the beach, El Papa had found the line attached to the stern of his boat. He ran it through his calloused hands until he came to the place where Amanda had cut it. Then he lifted his head in sorrow and squinted at the moon. "Aiee! Caraiee!" The Catalan oath rang out over the beach like the voice of a muezzin calling to the Faithful. "Spit in the milk!" El Papa said. "They've got the lot!"

Isidro said gloomily, "I told you not to trust the English. They are rarely as stupid as they look."

A moment later he was sitting on the beach, holding his ear, and El Papa was trudging sourly away over the sand, spitting in the milk.

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TAKING AN ELLE FOR AN INCH

Many a man in love with a dimple makes the mistake of marrying the whole girl.

STEPHEN LEACOCK

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STRANGE WEATHER FOR AUGUST

Curiosity mounted to fever pitch

BY JOHN KERR

BESSIE McGONNEGAL lived above the mortuary. Some say the horror of it made her spine shrivel when she was a little child and was the reason why her back was humped. Others swear that she was as straight as a willow until she was sixteen, when, without apparent reason, she picked up a chopper and killed her mother. They say that at the first blow the soul of Bessie McGonnegal curled up within her, and after that her body gradually became more crooked to accommodate the soul.

Few had actually seen Bessie McGonnegal, but her presence was always strongly felt in the vicinity of the mortuary. Her lace curtains stirred whenever anyone passed, and occasionally a face could be spied peeping through the yellowing threadbare lace. A face that seemed long-dead and forgotten, but with wild, living eyes.

It was such strange weather when Sister Gracie came to town —strange weather for August. The sky had an exciting, opalescent shimmer, and it was bluer than anyone had ever seen it before. The wistaria and the honeysuckle were out, which was certainly unusual for August, and a swarm of delicate white butterflies had settled on the town. Such blue-and-white weather.

Sister Gracie was an evangelist. It was rare for evangelists to walk into town without any luggage, and such excitement hadn't been known since Cocky Adams was gaoled for indecent assault.

Besides, she was a pretty woman, rounded and plump. She wore a virginal white dress whose skirt reached her ankles, and her yellow curls bounced beneath a small rose-trimmed hat. But it was her eyes that set the men talking, the round blue eyes you see in baby dolls. On the surface they seemed flat and glassy, but once those eyes had glanced at a man their memory ate inside him for a long time afterwards.

It wasn't only the menfolk she won over; there wasn't a woman in that town who wouldn't have been at her beck and

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call had she raised a little finger. That is excepting Bessie McGonnegal.

Bessie never left her home over the mortuary, and nobody took Sister Gracie to meet her.

The revival meetings were very successful, despite the fact that few souls were saved. The evenings terminated with dancing and refreshments, and the hymns were gusty and cheerful. Some thought they were too gusty, for on a night of twisted starlight and grotesque shadow the soul of one member of the congregation was wafted to heaven on the strains of good strong voices and the virile clapping of hands. He died attempting to reach a note far higher than any in his range. That night the meeting broke up in a more sober mood.

The following day, Sister Gracie visited the mortuary in a determined and last attempt to revive the body. As she was about to enter the house of the dead, she stopped as suddenly as though she had been shot in the back.

Her eyes peered upward through the blue wistaria at Bessie's window, and the shock of her sudden stillness made every eye around her look up, too—for Sister Gracie was unable to set foot outside the Terminus Hotel where she was staying without a loyal band of followers surrounding her.

They all saw the face. Some gasped, and others looked nervously away as though to deny its existence, but Sister Gracie looked straight up, and her eyes connected with two eyes above. She walked forward with a stiff, trance-like gait, as though she were balancing a goldfish bowl upon her head and was afraid to spill its contents, mounted the verandah, and disappeared into the house. The loyal supporters cried out for her to come back, for they still remembered the story of how Bessie had used the chopper on her mother.

But it was too late; the door had closed and a bough of wistaria sighed with pity as a puff of warm air blew down the street.

They waited for an hour, yet there was no scream, nor was there a sign of either Sister Gracie or Bessie McGonnegal. Many, fearing the evangelist was already dead, bowed their heads and silently returned to their homes, but a few were left when the door opened and Sister Gracie reappeared carrying a tea-tray set with dainty pink lustre-ware and a large seed cake. She put it on the verandah table, still with the dazed look in her eyes, then she stepped aside and helped Bessie McGonnegal out.

The crowd murmured and trembled with interest, like a tree when the wind blows through its branches, for Bessie was only three feet tall. She wore a little dress of shiny peach-coloured satin beneath a fine fox piece which flared out and hung on the

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floor behind her. In her hair was a large tortoiseshell comb, and she carried an enormous fan of peacock feathers. Her face was long and dark, with a hooked nose and black, bristling eyebrows, and when she laughed she showed a lot of bright pink gum and long yellow teeth.

She hopped on to her chair with the easy assurance of one who is used to sitting on chairs with breast-level seats, and the odd pair took their tea with many secret giggles and head-to-head confidences, quite oblivious of the astonished spectators. On the completion of tea they rose with the pride of Queens and re-entered the house, closing the door behind them.

They were neither seen nor heard for the next two weeks. Curiosity mounted to fever pitch in the little town, and wild and lurid rumours ran rife. In her absence, Sister Gracie's angelic reputation swelled to gigantic proportions and there were whispers of battering down the door and other, more reckless manœuvres to save their heroine. But these dashing thoughts were all unnecessary.

On a balmy morning, when the air smelt cool and green, and the August sky was a lyrical turquoise, they reappeared. Sister Gracie was still her old sweet self, smiling and dimpling at all she beheld, but the change in Bessie McGonnegal was simply miraculous. She had grown a full six inches, her hump was less pronounced, and the serenity in her eyes was a joy to see. Arm-in-arm, they walked the full length of Main Street, graciously bowing to all and sundry.

After that, their morning stroll became an eagerly awaited occurrence. Promptly at eleven o'clock, people would begin to line the pavement to watch the ill-assorted couple pass by. Eventually the familiarity of the sight caused it to become commonplace and the outing was gradually taken for granted. The little town sank into its normal monotony, and people went about their business with their customary sleepy, impenetrable expressions.

One morning, when the darkness still hung heavy in the trees, Sister Gracie was seen furtively leaving the little house above the mortuary. She clung to the early rays of slanting sunlight until she reached the Chapel Hall, and there, on the noticeboard, she pinned a large poster announcing her return to the Spiritual Practice. Sister Gracie had felt the call again.

Excited, buzzing crowds gathered round that poster all day, for few had seen the likes of it for beauty and fine workmanship. It was bold and large, embellished with great scrolls and twirls, and each letter was picked out with water-colours, giving the

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effect of a rainbow that could exist only in the mind of a child.

Word spread quickly, and all day the town received a steady flow of carts and jaloppies, strangers on horseback, and poorer people on foot. They came in from the surrounding towns and farms to welcome her back, and that evening the Chapel Hall was packed to capacity.

Sister Gracie, immaculate and smelling of freshly crushed mint, took her place on the platform amidst a round of enthusiastic applause. In the breathless hush that followed, Bessie McGonnegal appeared, but was soon to lose herself in the shadows at the back. Sister Gracie was in excellent form. Everyone was manifested, and the collection bags had to be passed round twice. Finally, as she shrank back exhausted after a particularly trying struggle for the soul of the chemist's wife, Sister Gracie announced that she was " tray fateeg "—it was her custom to speak a little French occasionally—and recommended the commencement of the dancing.

Chairs were hastily pushed aside and couples stood waiting for the music to begin—but nothing happened. It transpired that, in the excitement of Sister Gracie's reappearance, not one of the members of the three-piece band had remembered to bring their instruments.

Then, as the disappointed couples were about to return to their seats, a strange and lovely sound came from the shadows at the back of the platform.

It started on a long, sensuous wail that set the spine tingling with ecstasy, but soon the notes seemed to disrupt and flutter away gaily like the magnified rustle of a hundred butterfly wings. Not a movement stirred the hall.

The tune changed once more. This time it was grieving and low, and the listeners became bright-eyed and breathless. It was a mournful sound that struck a chord in every heart; which was obvious from the audible sniffing of the men, and the unchecked tears trickling unashamedly down the cheeks of the women. It was the telling of every secret that ever troubled a human soul, and sometimes, to have a secret told in public is a sad and terrible thing.

When the melody seemed about to soar to its climax, it suddenly stopped, leaving its listeners lost and bewildered, afraid of their own emotions, yet craving for more.

The silence was awesome, but as the audience gradually recovered its composure, a mighty and thunderous roar rattled the frame of the Chapel Hall, and coins jingled and bounced across the stage.

Someone darted into the shadows from whence the sound had

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come and brought forth a struggling and protesting Bessie McGonnegal, whose embarrassment was painful to behold, but as the spirit of warmth and friendliness surrounded her, the little creature softened and developed a temporary radiance, luminous and unearthly, like a moonbeam shining through a piece of coarse pagan glass.

Could this be the source of such exquisite music? Before the hysterical crowd could be sure, Sister Gracie came forward, collected the monetary offerings from the floor, and, taking her by the hand, led her dear friend home.

Next morning the secret was out. Before the soft grey of the dawn had touched the sky someone had changed the poster on the Chapel Hall noticeboard. The new one, equally elaborate, foretold a concert of Nose-Whistling by Miss Bessie McGonnegal that very night.

People reacted in various ways when they saw how Bessie actually produced this marvellous sound. Some stared in blank disbelief, others with wonderment written right across their faces, and there was fear in the expressions of the younger ones. To one unused to such happenings it must have been a very odd sight: Bessie would stand in the centre of the platform and sniff the air like a hound, then, with one finger pressing the hooked nose flat and another in her right ear, she'd begin stamping the time with her little feet, and as her neck cords bulged and stiffened the sound would emerge—a lovely song that soared and filled the Chapel Hall with its curious tones.

By popular demand the concerts became a nightly happening, and for several days Bessie McGonnegal received her ovations in a veritable cloudburst of silver, which Sister Gracie graciously collected.

One evening, a black and evil-looking bird flew out of the starlight and circled three times round the head of Bessie McGonnegal. A chill of horror spread over the hall; for it is a well-known fact that a bird of that hue is a sure sign of misfortune.

That night after the show Bessie caught cold. At first it settled in her bowels, then gradually made its way up to her head, and the concerts had to be cancelled, but under Sister Gracie's loving care she soon recovered and was able to prepare for her come-back performance within a matter of days.

Taking up the nose-whistling position, Bessie drew a deep breath, and the silence that ensued was as deep and final as that of the mortuary. She puffed and blew until her eyes became red and ragged-looking. But it was no use—the gift had left her. In her distraction Sister Gracie temporarily lost faith and resorted to pouring patent balsams up Bessie's nostrils and right ear.

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But it was all to no avail, for the lovely tones were silenced for ever.

Within a week Bessie McGonnegal had forgotten about the whole affair, but with Sister Gracie it was another thing. She became broody and restless, her eyes were fixed on the horizon with a yearning look, and the sound of a train-whistle was enough to set her pacing Main Street like a demented soul.

Early one morning the town was rent in two by a terrible high-pitched scream that trembled and echoed through the sleeping buildings. Fearing the worst, everyone rushed to the house of Bessie McGonnegal, and to their horror the voice of Sister Gracie came from within the mortuary itself.

She called out in a high, thin voice that the urge to spread her faith in distant townships had come upon her, and to prevent her carrying out her mission the wicked old woman had locked her in. There sat Bessie McGonnegal guarding the door, a terrible sight with her face sullen and heavy, and a broken look in her eyes, cracked, and smouldering with the red fires of hell. And no man had the courage to help the imprisoned evangelist.

There was an air of tension in the town that day, and the atmosphere was charged with that same sultry electricity that precedes a storm. As the afternoon dragged by, even the wind seemed afraid to blow, and nerves were stretched to breaking-point. Silent, fear-stricken groups gathered outside the mortuary and listened to Sister Gracie's impassioned sobbing.

Pale, watery stars were piercing the sky when the prisoner finally managed to force an undignified exit through the small window of a little-used toilet, and dashed to the spectators for protection. With the speed of a knife quivering in a tree, the men formed a chain between her and Bessie McGonnegal.

As though from a heart already too full, a tear trickled down Bessie's cheek and she held her arms out to her friend, but the masculine barrier was too strong and she knew that Sister Gracie was beyond her reach for ever.

A great load seemed to descend on her shoulders, for her body had taken on the old crooked look. She walked quietly back into the house, pausing once to see if her friend's heart had not softened, but Sister Gracie was absorbed in rearranging the battered rosebuds on her small straw hat.

Back in the window once again, Bessie McGonnegal saw angry, accusing eyes staring up at her, and fast becoming a blur in the evening distance was a white figure astride an old and bony mule. Sister Gracie was fading into the future, and she was alone.

Suddenly a blinding flash of lightning momentarily paralysed

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Bessie's world and everything swam in a scarlet sea. Her face was wet and clammy, and she felt a desperate desire to hold something in her hands, but what she knew not. Nervously her fingers curled and uncurled, plucking and tearing at each other; her breathing was torn by strangled sobs. And then, out of the black and scarlet mists of time, her feet found where to take her.

A cupboard door creaked and swayed dizzily before her, and with soul-gnawing desire she flung herself against it until it splintered beneath her weight. With sensuous relief she saw what she craved for—an old and rusted, bloodstained chopper . . .

The house above the mortuary is deserted now, and the wistaria is dead and gone. People avoid passing that way, for it has a strange, demented look which is both threatening and wild. Some say a mad woman once lived and died there. Others will tell you that it was once the home of a lonely little freak who longed for someone to love.

★ ★ ★

ASSORTED FANCIES

A little of what you fancy does you good, but a little learning is a dangerous thing, so if you fancy your learning isn't up to our teasers, it's plain you should turn to page 100 and enlarge your store of general knowledge. Total answers should amount to 13.

1. *You are off for a sailing holiday, and feel you ought to have a national flag of some kind on board. What flag should you carry (if British)?*
2. *You are a golfer and, on approaching your ball, you observe that an impediment, to wit, a large worm, obstructs you from hitting it. Do the rules allow you to remove the worm?*
3. *What should we do without August Bank-Holiday? But in actual fact we did do without it until—when?*
4. *Who is the Lord of the Isles?*
5. *Can you name the artists who illustrated these books:*
   a. Alice in Wonderland; b. Trilby; c. The English: Are They Human? d. 1066 *And All That*
6. *Who are the patron Saints of: a. France b. Spain c. Wales d. Scotland*
7. *Who said: "Cricketers, to whom age brings golf instead of wisdom"*

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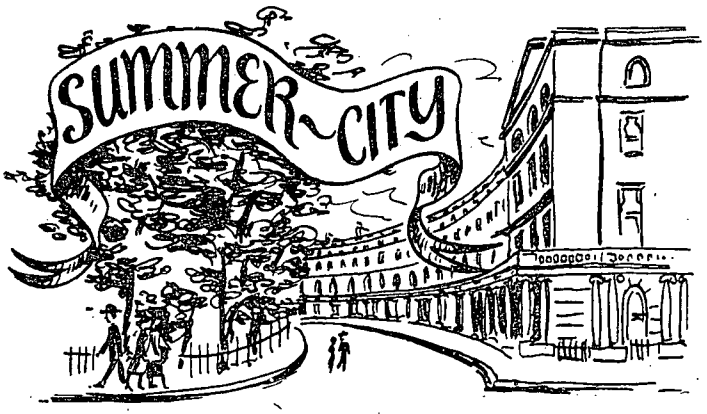

You know how it was when we used to meet:
Those fleeting hours in the city street,
Because they were stolen, were twice as sweet.

We walked in a secret world, and found
Islands flowering in barren ground
Heard in the traffic the sea waves sound.

Oh! but London was wonderful when
Through Spring and Summer we wandered; then
I felt like a god amongst mortal men.

I wait no longer for your light feet
Where beauty blossomed with each heart-beat,
And now the Strand is only a street.

DOUGLAS GIBSON, *The Strand*

Moment of June

For having lived in Westminster—how many years now? over twenty—one feels even in the midst of the traffic, or waking at night, Clarissa was positive, a particular hush, or solemnity; an indescribable pause; a suspense (but that might be her heart, affected, they said, by influenza) before Big Ben strikes. There! Out it boomed. First a warning, musical; then the hour, irrevocable. The leaden circles dissolved in the air. Such fools we are, she thought, crossing Victoria Street. For Heaven only knows why one loves it so, how one sees it so, making it up, building it round one, tumbling it, creating it every moment

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afresh; but the veriest frumps, the most dejected of miseries sitting on doorsteps (drink their downfall) do the same; can't be dealt with, she felt positive, by Acts of Parliament for that very reason: they love life. In people's eyes, in the swing, tramp and trudge; in the bellow and the uproar; the carriages, motor cars, omnibuses, vans, sandwich men shuffling and swinging; brass bands; barrel organs; in the triumph and the jingle and the strange high singing of some aeroplane overhead was what she loved; life; London; this moment of June.

VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Mrs. Dalloway*

Stroll in the Park

Come all you noble, you that are neat ones,
Hyde Park is now both fresh and green
Come all you gallants that are great ones,
And are desirous to be seen:
Would you a wife or mistress rare,
Here are the best of England fair;
Here you may choose, also refuse,
As you your judgments please to use.

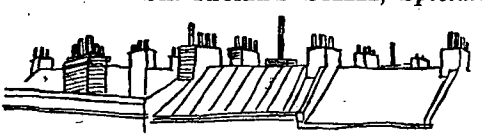
Here come the girls of the rich City,
Aldermen's daughters fair and proud,
Their jealous mothers come t' invite ye,
For fear they should be lost i' the crowd:
Who for their breeding are taught to dance,
Their birth and fortune to advance:
And they will be as frolic and free,
As you yourself expect to see.

Westminster Drolleries, 1671

Brushing off the Bloom

Chimney sweepers passed by us as we made off to the market, and some raillery happened between one of the fruit wenches and those black men, about the devil and Eve . . . I could not believe any place more entertaining than Covent Garden; where I strolled from one fruit-shop to another, with crowds of agreeable young women round me.

SIR RICHARD STEELE, *Spectator*, *1712*



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A Day in Town

The quiet pavements of the morning gleam
With dew, the roofs are razor-bright
In sun, and from a memory of night
The blue day rises like a misty dream.

At noon our shadow walks beside us like a dog.
Behind the radiant windows of the afternoon
Our secret thoughts remember a forgotten tune
Played in a peaceful street in autumn fog.

Now in the early evening light
Trees drift, as we walk, like pale clouds
Of green through the indifferent crowds;
And lamps like crystal birds sing in the leaves of night.

JAMES KIRKUP, *London Spring*

Pleasure Gardens

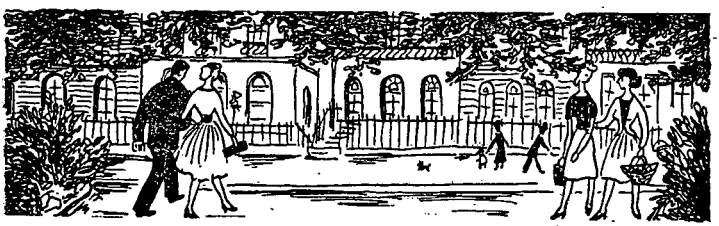
The Ladies that have an inclination to be private, take Delight in the close Walks of Spring-Gardens, where both Sexes meet, and mutually serve one another as Guides to lose their way; and the Windings and turnings in the little Wildernesses are so intricate, that the most experienced Mothers have oft lost themselves in looking for their Daughters.

THOMAS BROWN, 1730

Crone Imperiall

Empress of towns, exalt in honour;
In beawtie beryng the crone imperiall;
Swete paradise precelling in pleasure:
London, thou art the flour of Cities all.

WILLIAM DUNBAR



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TA-RA-RA BOOM!

Jove! that girl was a stunner

BY LESLIE BONNET

THE moon disappeared in a smoke of cloud, like a quenched tallow dip. The troop of horse drew up in a shifting line abreast. There was a curt command, a whimper of steel. Then blades glinted in the moon's returning light. A bugle brayed suddenly.

"Charge!" yelled the lieutenant, rowelling his steed. And in one violent upheaval, the whole troop, sabres waving, cheering wildly, thundered heavily across the deep meadow.

The extensive mansion known as The Place, standing on its high terrace, overlooked this horrid scene. The Place was better known as Madame Mansfield's Select Academy for the Daughters of Gentlemen.

From its front windows the crowded faces of affrighted young ladies protruded like bunches of white breakfast radishes. Madame Mansfield and Mr. Nettleton flirted in shadow beneath them.

From one bedroom window the ends of a flannel night-shirt and a pair of hairy legs waved as if in encouragement.

This was the background against which the drama of that heavy summer night was played.

It was a Saturday night in mid July. The day had been very hot. Indeed, this summer of 1864 was a torrid one. A rise in the average temperature of a few degrees over a period plays odd pranks with human dispositions. Let that excuse, if excuse be needed, what follows . . .

Just three weeks before this, Mr. Nettleton was loitering in the lane that led up from Lashings Episcopi to Madame Mansfield's Select Academy for the Daughters of Gentlemen. He waited where chestnut trees reached over to throw a welcome shade.

Was he a little more spruce than was usual? The clothes were the same, the long black frock-coat, the sober waistcoat, the tight drab trousers. But the hat was new, a soft brown felt one, with the brim cocked up at both sides. It had a jaunty air.

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This was more than Mr. Nettleton himself had. His long auburn moustache was as neatly waxed and as boldly twirled as ever. The fine, curly hair that showed beneath the new hat shone with pomade.

But the face of the Arithmetic master, never purposeful at best, was white with dread.

He was about to propose.

There was more in his manner than the proper diffidence of the enraptured swain. This was because there was more at stake than the chance of married happiness. There was a comfortable competence to be gained; for only a week ago the deserving Agatha Roundhay had received news of a legacy worth fully two hundred pounds a year.

So Mr. Nettleton burned with the desire to make Agatha his wife, a desire which was nearly a week old. At the same time he had grave doubts of his resoluteness in such a matter as this; for he was not a man of bold resolution.

But, on the other hand, two hundred pounds a year was worth steeling oneself to acquire.

With what sweet innocence did the object of his passion approach! The sight of her put a stop to his nervous pacings. He stood there in warm shadow, stiff as doom, grinning with fright.

None with a conscience clear would have stood so in awe of Miss Agatha Roundhay. Her profession, which lay in teaching fine needlework, singing, and the use of the globes to the young ladies at the Academy, had not marked her. At the age of twenty-seven she was still kittenish.

She came along the lane now, petite but plump, light of foot, but almost round; like a soft ball bouncing along, waiting for someone to play with it.

Mr. Nettleton's fingers twitched.

When Agatha suddenly espied him, apparently wrestling with his passions in unhallowed shade, she uttered a little cry of delight and embarrassment. It was so exciting to be accosted; but what would Madame say if she knew that members of her staff of opposite sexes were encountering in public?

Mr. Nettleton stepped forward and flourished his new hat. "What a delight, Miss Roundhay, to meet with you in such a charming setting."

Agatha could see by her colleague's frantic smile that the meeting had been contrived. In her amiable simplicity she attributed this to her own charms. She smiled encouragement, resettling her light cape round her shoulders so as to show the trim, striped satin bodice beneath it.

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"May I perhaps accompany you?" suggested Mr. Nettleton with an air of bravado.

Agatha nodded and smiled. They went slowly up the lane together, her gay parasol bobbing defensively between them. He walked, head down, sighing significantly from time to time. Miss Roundhay hid her face beneath the tilted brim of her flower-piled hat.

At last the proposal came. They both stopped, Agatha to savour the situation, Mr. Nettleton to get breath. They found themselves leaning against a field gate looking down over sun-parched pastures. Mr. Nettleton heaved a final and a sincere sigh. He was accomplishing the business with ease.

Agatha looked up at him with glowing eyes. "Mr. Nettleton," she said falteringly, "I do not know how to answer you."

"Do but say the word," he begged, showing his teeth in a desperate smile.

"But Madame Mansfield, who is to tell her? What will she say? She will never permit it."

Mr. Nettleton did not think she would, either. The rounded but unbending Principal of the Select Academy would discern his motives in a trice.

"We must elope," he said, as if he had just thought of it.

"Oh Reginald!" breathed Agatha, her eyes adoring. "How perfectly splendid!"

Reginald could not refrain from twirling his moustache.

It is a coincidence that these twain should thus be discussing elopement, because the same subject was also being studied by two other persons at about this same time. One of them was Prudence Lovejoy, one of Madame's senior pupils. Prudence (so christened surely in despair) was eighteen years of age, pale, pouting, and pretty.

The fortunate man who had fixed Prudence's mind upon himself was, not unnaturally, a Captain, Percival Harris by name. He was dashing, erect, incoherent, capable of expressing himself only by stroking the points of his lavishly shaped mutton-chop whiskers or slapping his calf with his cane.

At this time the term at the Select Academy was dozing towards its close. Soon all the young ladies would be dismissed for the season, would come under the dominion of papas, mammas and chaperones. Also, they would meet other dashing young men.

"It is now or never," thought Captain Harris. He did not say this. He did not usually say that much.

The love of Captain Harris was of a truly romantic type. Not to deceive the reader, it must be understood that he was not a

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regular captain; but a captain in the volunteer yeomanry. Born to a prosperous country solicitor's practice, where coherence of speech and thought was unnecessary, he lived in reasonable affluence. But heroic day-dreams drove him to the profession of arms as a spare-time hobby and to the conviction that elopement was the proper prelude to married life.

The proximity of the Select Academy was, therefore, providential. Chance soon threw Prudence Lovejoy in his path, and the gallant officer planned their elopement with the same dogged fervour with which he would have planned to elope with anyone else who had been thrown in his path.

In this posture affairs stood for a while, as hot day followed hot day. The corrective routine of the Academy went on and on. No sign appeared of the plots that were afoot. Madame Mansfield's path seemed smooth and firm, if arduous. How could she perceive the burrowings that were going on beneath her feet?

See her chatting with her husband in the withdrawing-room, oblivious of approaching pitfalls. She is a robust woman of middle age, attractive in the ripe beauty that no lacing can restrain. The loud creaks that accompany emotion or movement on her part are no rebuke to her stays-maker, who, good woman, has done her best.

Major Mansfield (Retd.) sits in his favourite rocking-chair. Blind to his good fortune, or dazed by it, his gaze is bent, not upon the proud charms of his spouse but upon one or two hairs that he has plucked absently from his brindled side-whiskers. He is wide, short, ruddy of face, and almost neckless.

Madame breaks the silence. "Humphrey, my love," she says, "it is surely time for bed."

The Major sits up straight with a start. "Naturally, my dear, of course. Dammit, nearly midnight."

Madame Mansfield rises with difficulty, but with grace. The whalebones groan like driven slaves. The Major, extinguishing the lights, takes one candle in his hand to light them upstairs.

It is that Saturday night in mid July.

After another scorched day, evening had dropped like a cool, damp kerchief on Earth's fevered brow. Now, as deep night fell, shreds of torn cloud began to sidle across the sky. The parched countryside glistened in the harsh light of a full moon.

The high walls of the Academy stared across the terrace. Every bedroom window was open. This was confusing. Mr. Nettleton had stolen from his bachelor quarters in the outbuildings behind the garden. He stood hesitating on the gravel in front of the school, a long ladder in his arms. Agatha had said she would leave open her bedroom window.

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It cannot be concealed that Reginald chose the wrong one. He reared his ladder with anxious care, let it drop without a sound against the window-sill, and climbed it with noiseless feet. The room before him was still with the silence of expectancy. Excited, he dropped one cautious leg through the window and then stood inside waiting for the thrilled whisper—" Reginald? "

It was the Major's amiable habit upon retiring to clasp for a decent interval his partner in a bewhiskered embrace. Which done, he would turn over on his back with a manly snort and go snoring through the night. So, as Mr. Nettleton stood awaiting the soft trill of a loving voice, he heard a thump as the Major turned, a severe snort, and then the voice of Madame, younger and more tremulous than he had heard it before.

" Humphrey! There is someone in the room! "

" What? Nonsense, my dear. Nonsense! "

" Humphrey! "

" Er—what? What did you say, Priscilla? Great heavens! " There was a harsh creak of springs. Mr. Nettleton could see, as he stood in shadow against the wall, the great head of the Major, horribly bewhiskered, surmounted by his white nightcap.

He gained the ground just as the Major reached the window.

" Stap me! " yelled the Major, clapping his hand to his forehead as he leaned out, bristling, " It's that feller Nettleton! Hey! Stop, you! Let me carve the liver out of you! "

Mr. Nettleton was alarmed. The Major was a man of choleric temper. He was plainly upset. Already he was lowering himself backwards over the window ledge. To gain time, Mr. Nettleton took the ladder away.

Major Mansfield, groping clumsily for the rungs with his bare feet, felt the ladder's removal just in time. He gave a roar of dismay, scrabbling desperately at the brickwork with his toes, his chest still inside the bedroom. A nasty accident might well have ensued had not the window—a heavy sash frame—suddenly slid down, pinning the Major in a position of safety, if not of comfort.

With the descent of the window the Major's head and shoulders disappeared. All that Mr. Nettleton could see of him was the prominent nether part enveloped in a capacious nightshirt of pale flannel out of which two short, hairy legs waved convulsively. If he was saying anything, Mr. Nettleton couldn't hear it, which was a comfort to him.

Madame Mansfield, apparently hopeless of freeing her husband, now appeared at the next window, and, leaning out of it in all the magnificence of maturity, called " Fire! " in a rich contralto.

No answer came. She disappeared. But while Mr. Nettleton

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still stood, irresolute, the ladder at his feet, she came from the front door towards him.

In the clear moonlight she was an impressive sight. Her night-gown was high-necked and descended over the bosom in an unhurried succession of smocked pleats until it at last, reluctantly, reached the ground. Over it she had thrown a black mantle which testified to respectability in fact, if not in intention.

She reached out and caught Mr. Nettleton's hand. She was a little out of breath. "Oh! It was madness, Reginald! But how ardent!" she said softly, squeezing his hand.

Mr. Nettleton licked his lips in perplexity. He had long known that his employer cherished a partiality for him. He had done nothing to discourage it, though it was hardly in his nature to deserve it. His plan to elope with Agatha's legacy was clearly impracticable now. Best to make what capital he could of this misunderstanding.

They had moved along a little under the house wall: the Major's legs, kicking in the moonlight, had been distracting.

"Yes, it was a sudden madness," said Reginald. "Irresistible. Something drove me"—warming to his topic—"something sublime."

"Hush, you wicked man!" murmured Madame. The next moment, she started and clutched Reginald in terror. "Heavens! what is that?"

In the meadow below there was a gruff command, a whimper of metal. Then drawn swords glinted in the moon's light. A bugle brayed suddenly.

"Charge!" yelled some lieutenant, spurring his steed. And in one violent upheaval a whole troop of horse, weapons upraised, cheering wildly, thundered heavily across the deep meadow.

It was the romantic Captain Harris's diversion, planned to attract attention to the front of the Academy while he carried out his rearguard operation.

And a very successful diversion it was. Almost all the pupils were crowded at the windows, enjoying the fearful sight. As soon as the last crashings of lost and entangled horsemen had died away down in the far orchard, the night air was full of the exciting sibilance of female whispering.

Madame, suddenly aware of her situation, cooled quickly. Mr. Nettleton had never got warm. He stood now in some dejection, dripping audibly. Just as the cavalry had gathered speed someone from a bedroom window above him had discharged a jug of water over his head. He suspected that Agatha must have heard his apostasy.

And so indeed she had. At that very moment she lay, face

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downward on her maiden bed, lamenting his perfidy. Then, after a while, shaking herself with pitiful pride, she dried her eyes, and in the costume she had donned to elope in she went to walk, solitary, in the garden.

"Come, Mr. Nettleton," said Madame in a firm authoritative voice. "We must release the Major at once."

Mr. Nettleton nodded miserably. He had almost forgotten the Major, although his flapping disturbed the eye continually. It is remarkable how quickly the human mind learns to accept something out of the way as commonplace.

He went to the ladder and began to raise it. Then a dreadful shriek was heard from behind the house. He dropped it again, and, hand in hand, he and Madame hurried round to the back.

Captain Percival Harris had planned the elopement with care. A post-chaise was waiting at The Load of Hay in Lashings Episcopi village. The school ladder had been located. Then there was the masterly diversion. All pointed to a quick, quiet departure.

Matters miscarried. The ladder was gone. In fact, of course, Mr. Nettleton already had it. The dashed Captain stood under the window of Prudence Lovejoy. She, bursting with amorous impatience, leaned out to him, radiant. He looked up, handsome, serious, frustrated.

"My love—"

"My prince—"

"The ladder's not there. What shall I do?"

"Let me but leap into your arms," said Prudence from up there, with more enthusiasm than knowledge of ballistics.

Captain Harris paled, but flinched not. "My arms await you, my love," he whispered. Grace Vavasour, Prudence's room-mate, listening in discreet silence, sighed with rapture.

The Captain had not reckoned with Prudence Lovejoy's luggage. When Prudence trilled, "I come!" he stood, feet firmly braced, arms wide to receive her. But first came three hat-boxes, one portmanteau, two large wrapped packages with sharp edges, a bound bundle of non-devotional books and a tuck-box.

The hat-boxes dazed, the miscellaneous luggage wounded. It was the tuck-box that stunned him. When Prudence dropped like a ripe plum no outstretched hands received her. She landed dully upon the prostrate form of the man she had loved.

The fall shook her. Some of the glamour seemed to have gone. She had not been so close to Captain Harris before. He looked unexpectedly old and uncommonly hairy. And his mouth hung open in a positively foolish way. Prudence shuddered, as her

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mother had shuddered before her; but, fortunate child, Prudence shuddered in time.

Turning her back on romance and the body of Captain Percival Harris, Prudence began to negotiate with Grace Vavasour for the means of re-entry to her bedroom.

So it was that when Madame and Mr. Nettleton came to where the back bedrooms looked out over the gardens they saw, stiff and stark upon the gravelled path, the motionless figure of a military gentleman. But above him, halfway up the wall, clinging to a frail rope of sheets, was the comely figure of Prudence Lovejoy. Above her, leaning back from the window, her room-mate tugged ineffectually.

"Prudence Lovejoy!" barked Madame as they both stood below.

That was apparently Grace Vavasour's first intimation of the presence of authority. She naturally let go the end of the sheet while she looked out of the window to confirm her fears. This thoughtless act left Prudence unsupported. Mr. Nettleton had a brief glimpse of ankle-length, frilled knickers, of billowing petticoats, and then he achieved what Captain Harris had missed by seconds, the pleasure of being stunned by Prudence Lovejoy.

By the time he came round Prudence had disappeared. Madame was patting his cheeks very warmly. "You need not have clasped her so firmly," she said.

When they got back again to the terrace, a band was playing to an ecstatic audience of pupils in all stages of dishevelled dress. They had released the Major who, apparently unhurt, and still in his nightshirt, was conducting the band in a determined rendering of *Heart of Oak*. The red tassel on his nightcap was flapping madly with his exertions.

The Lashings Episcopi Prize Brass Band had never been a sober body, and it was evident to Madame as she came upon the scene that inebriation was rife. There were twelve instrumentalists besides the conductor and the big drum, of whom seven could stand.

Nevertheless, three and sometimes five at a time were contriving to respond to the Major's conducting. The trombone was particularly assiduous, though the serpent had given up and lay kicking on the gravel.

Ignoring her pupils for a moment, Madame tapped the Major peremptorily on the shoulder. He turned and saw her. He saw Mr. Nettleton too. He gave him a grim look. "I'll deal with you in the morning, sir!" he snapped, not ceasing to wield the baton.

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"What is this disgraceful disturbance?" demanded Madame.

"Oh, perfectly all right, my dear," the Major assured her over his shoulder. "Our band has just won the Band Festival Cup. Heard 'em playing down in the village earlier tonight. Grand fellers. Nice of 'em to come. Get the girls to bed, m' dear. I'll get rid of these in a jiffy."

Madame thought it politic to comply. There might be a faint hope of not losing the esteemed Nettleton.

So she nodded agreeably and turned to spread terror among the pupils. It was more difficult than she had expected. She felt the lack of her stays.

It was one o'clock in the morning before the Lashings Episcopi Prize Band retreated down the drive. At their conductor's suggestion each man wore his boots hanging round his neck by the laces—"So as not to waken the ladies!" They had tiptoed away on bare feet, playing *See the Conquering Hero Comes* at full blast.

When they had gone there was only the cold hush of night, and moonlight licking the walls of the old mansion. One window glowed yellow, where Madame and Major Mansfield prepared to recompose themselves.

From force of habit, the methodical Major clasped Madame briskly to him. Madame, with decent docility, submitted to the scrubby embrace.

Then, while the master snored assertively, she opened her eyes again. The same bedroom window was open. Madame smiled and went to sleep, purring proudly.

The ardent Nettleton, back in his bachelor quarters, neither smiled nor slept. He thought of the morrow and the prospect of dismissal.

He thought, too, of Miss Prudence Lovejoy. The craven laggard did not spare one thought for Agatha Roundhay.

She, at that moment, was seated upon the box of the post-chaise from the Load of Hay. She was clashing a pair of cymbals with an air of satisfaction. Before the vehicle staggered the remnants of the Lashings Episcopi Prize Band.

The big drum was still active. The trombone survived. These and a desultory cornet completed the effective performers. The rest, conductor as well, were sprawled in the back of the post-chaise in limp attitudes. With them sprawled the driver of the post-chaise, inebriated too.

They were just entering the main street of Lashings Episcopi. Beside Agatha, on the box, Captain Percival Harris sat, wielding the reins. The ragged clouds had fled to westward. From a

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clear, black sky the stars came down close. Behind Martintop Wood a spent moon smouldered.

Captain Harris gazed at Agatha, who tossed her head with happiness and dashed the cymbals lustily. They both looked very sentimental.

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NIGHT WATCH

Two men in this silent, dead world
heard the soft, far splash

BY JOSEPH WHITEHILL

THE Chief Engineer was comfortably settled in a canvas chair by the head of the gangway, peering down at the watch cap he was knitting and proudly counting to himself the rows he had just added, when the Third Mate emerged from the deck-house and thumped down his seabag. Four minutes after that event, Chief Baker's gentle content had been irreparably destroyed, the destruction commencing with the Third Mate's light remark, "Hey, Chief, guess who I saw up in the town this afternoon."

Baker thought, twelve—thirteen—fourteen, nodded his heavy grey head to secure the figures, pushed his glasses back up his nose to where they had to be for seeing anything five feet away, and asked, "Who?"

"The Liar," said the Third Mate, with mischief in his grin. "You remember him. Otto Rount. He just made one trip with us, from Balboa to Shanghai. About ten years ago."

"Oh," said Chief Engineer Baker. "Oh no. Not him."

"Sure. He asked if you were still aboard."

"What'd you tell him?"

"I told him, yes, you were. He was glad to know it. I think he remembers you better than any of the rest of us."

"Why me, for heaven's sake?" Chief Engineer Baker let his knitting fall to his lap.

"I dunno. I suppose because you had him searched when we threw him off the ship at Shanghai. A fella don't forget that too shortly. He's the same old Liar, boy! He banged my ear about all the money he was just about going to make, but it seems he left his wallet in his other trousers—you know the way he used to talk—so I had to buy the drinks to celebrate. What a guy!"

The Third Mate bent over the log desk and signed out, then moved his brass chit on the Ship's Company Board from *Aboard* to *Ashore*. As he heaved his seabag to his shoulder he said, "Well, be seein' you," and he marched down the gangway.

Baker was so stunned by the news he had just heard that he was a full minute becoming aware of the Third Mate's departure.

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When he struggled to his feet and looked down the wharf, the man had already disappeared. Baker cried plaintively and softly into the empty air, "Hey, wait," then he hurried off in near panic to find the Captain.

The Captain was in his cabin packing his shore clothes into a canvas suitcase. Baker knocked on the steel jamb of the open door to call the Captain's attention.

"Yes, Mr. Baker?" The Captain's wan face wore an unpleasant expression, as though he grievously resented even the smallest delay in getting ashore.

Chief Baker licked his lips before he said, "I just now saw the Third go ashore with his seabag, Captain, but he's down on the watch-list to stand gangway tonight. I thought you ought to know."

The Captain resumed his packing, rolling each article of underwear and each pair of socks as tightly as possible, then wedging it securely into his suitcase with nervous, hurried hands. "I was going to see you about that, Able." By the inevitability of marine vernacular, Chief Engineer Baker had long ago been nicknamed Able. "Red had to leave tonight to make it to Buffalo on the train. His wife lives there, you know."

"Well, all right, but with everybody else ashore too, who's going to stand gangway watch tonight?"

"I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to do it. I can't order you to; I'm *asking* you to."

"Oh *no*, Captain."

"Why not?"

"Well, I was going ashore. Some of the men from the old *Dolly Burgess* are in town and we were going to get together."

"I'm sorry about that," the Captain said blandly. "But you'll see them tomorrow . . . Look, with the First Mate *and* the Second Mate in the hospital with fever, you're the only one left that knows the ship's compartmentation. So you'll have to stand gangway. It's just for tonight. You'll have a couple of seamen back tomorrow morning, and then it'll be all right for them to take over. But tonight we've got to have a responsible officer of the ship aboard."

The Captain laid a pair of blue cotton trousers out on the bunk and rolled each leg separately from ankle to crotch; then, pairing the two leg-rolls, wrapped them tightly in the seat material of the trousers and put the finished piece in his bag. "I'm sorry, Able, but you see how it is."

Able Baker was not one capable of altering a long-planned course so abruptly. He remarked quasi-conversationally, "We were all going to have a big steak dinner."

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The Captain snapped his bag shut. " Look, Able, they'll be there tomorrow night, too. You can have your dinner then."

Able wiped his hands on the full seat of his trousers. " All right, Captain, all right. But would you do me a favour, then? "

The Captain said, " What is it? "

" Call over to Peter Mai's or drop in there and tell them I won't be able to make it tonight, but that I'll be there tomorrow night."

" All right. Glad to."

Chief Engineer Baker nodded by way of saluting and aimed his podgy bulk down the dim passageway towards the watertight door which gave onto the main deck.

When the Captain emerged a few minutes later, he found Able standing by the rail holding his knitting in his hands and looking at it as though he could not understand it. After the Captain moved his brass chit across the Ship's Company Board, only Able's remained in the *Aboard* column.

The Captain put down his suitcase by the head of the gangway while he worked his hands into his white dress gloves. When the gloves were on, he said, " It's all yours now, Mr. Baker. The fender boards have been belayed on deck, so you won't have to tend anything except maybe the springlines. There're three men in the starboard watch whose liberties are up at eight hundred. Drunk or sober, don't let them go below."

" Ay, sir . . . Say, Captain, did you hear about the Liar being in this town now? "

" The Liar? "

" Otto Rount. We threw him off in Shanghai."

The Captain smiled. " *You* threw him off, as I recollect. Well, if he shows up around here, send him off. He might steal the jolly-boat . . . Well, good night, Mr. Baker."

" Good night, sir."

Baker remained by the rail abstractedly chewing his full underlip as he watched his Captain stride briskly down the wharf swinging his suitcase. Not once, Baker saw with sadness, did the Captain look back at his ship standing high and sharply drawn in the failing smoky light of the city evening.

When the Captain had disappeared round the side of the long grey warehouse at the landward end of the wharf, Able Baker, plump and lonely, shuffled to the deck station under the awning and sat down heavily in the canvas watch chair. He tipped it back against the bulkhead of the deck-house where, just above his head, the five speaking-tubes snaked down from the overhead and ended in a row of bell mouths beside the watch desk.

When you turn off everything in a ship, Baker mused, you kill it. It might just as well be hard aground or waiting for the

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scrappers . . . Only at a time like this, with his ship moored in a still dock, the auxiliary shut down, and the main engine silent, when the ventilators all had ceased their rushing sound and even the ticking bilge-pump was dead; only at a time like this did Baker sense the fundamental deadness of a steel vessel. It isn't fair, he thought. Asking me to stand this watch. *Suppose the Liar comes down here tonight.*

The stillness and lack of motion made Able Baker uncomfortable without his knowing why, so he rose with a protesting grimace and fussed around his watch station doing things of little need and less consequence, just to be moving. He snapped on the floodlight which was strung up over the head of the gangway. He felt about with his blunt hand in the wedge-shaped space under the lid of the watch desk, shoving aside the wads of cotton waste until he found the holster and belt of the guard pistol. He withdrew these, and after lengthening the belt, which some slimmer man had lately worn, he buckled on the gun. With his rigging knife he sharpened the string-hung pencil and wrote in the deck log: *Captain ashore—2015. Set the gangway watch.*

Now wait a minute. I don't want any trouble. Either giving it or getting it. And he could make me just that mad, too. Able took the guard pistol out of its holster and snapped out the clip into his palm. After only a little pause he closed his fingers over the clip and put it back in the watch desk.

With nothing further handy to do, Able Baker hitched up the lopsided weight of the heavy pistol and strolled to the rail. The memory of that old, horrible voyage thrust itself upon him with all its earlier painful clarity.

The tubby and smiling Otto Rount had appeared on board the ship at Balboa, C.Z., telling of having been set upon by bandits while leading a pack train across Nicaragua. He thus claimed to have been set adrift in Balboa penniless and without recourse, and begged the Captain for the chance to earn his passage back to the United States. When he was told the ship was headed for Shanghai, he thought a moment, then said, well, it *was* rather a long way round, but he would sign on anyway. As they said of him later in the forecastle, Otto could talk an anchor clean through a hawse-hole if he just set his mind to it.

Otto was put in Able Baker's division, starboard watch, and was told to learn diesel lubrication. Otto, smooth-skinned and symmetrically rounded, had for three days bustled about in the roaring, hot engine-room carrying a long-spouted oilcan and, with great enthusiasm and wonderful ineptitude, had oiled everything that moved. Then he had collapsed from the heat, and

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Able, feeling to blame, had nursed him with sugar cubes and brine while listening in rapt fascination to the exciting tales of Otto's adventures in the Upper Amazon. For the good of the engines, the Captain had transferred Otto into the deck gang on the sixth day.

On the seventh day, the men in the deck gang hung the name "Liar" on Otto, for it was evident to them that nobody mortal could have been to all those places and done all those things and made all that money and won all those fights—"without it *showed* on him some place."

Otto seemed not at all disturbed by the nickname, and continued in his tale-spinning and his regretful avoidance of work. A rust chip flew into his eye from the edge of his chipping-hammer, he said, so he was obliged to use hot compresses and wear a black patch for two days. Able Baker, sincere and believing, had heated the water for the compresses and defended Otto from the calumny of the deck apes.

Otto's eye mended just in time to let him be the first to sight land as they raised Mount Konahuanui, on Oahu. The ship remained in port at Honolulu for three days, taking on water and fuel, and trading light farm equipment for pumice and soda ash. All hands had liberty and made the most of it. Otto went ashore whenever he could and, because he was not invited to buddy along with the rest, went alone about his own affairs.

It was not until the second day out on the way to China, after the crew's spirits had settled down and the men had outlived their shore-bought crapulence and had tidied up their lockers and seabags, that they came to believe that Otto's business ashore had been more of their concern than they had believed. Among the missing items were four tax-free wristwatches the bosun had intended to peddle in China, three carved salad forks an old seaman had bought in Cuba and forgotten to mail home from Balboa, two new pea-jackets belonging to the port watch, and one solid gold fountain pen.

The fountain pen was Able's. He wandered in a hurt daze for two days, telling no one, while he tried to decide what to do. For no one aboard but Otto would have taken it. He had shown it to Otto one day while trying to persuade him to make a career of the sea. The pen had been given him by the ship line upon completion of Able's twenty-fifth year with the company. Able had kept it in a slim chamois bag hung from satin twine beside his bunk, where he could look at it before he went to sleep. It had never had ink in it, for Able Baker was a pencil man himself. Now just the chamois bag was left.

At length, Able had gone to the old seaman who had lost the

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three salad forks, and who was totting up the missing items, to report the loss of his pen. Because he enjoyed the lies so much, Able was unwilling to believe Otto was a liar; but because he enjoyed the thievery not at all, he was ready to admit that Otto might be a thief. Lying for entertainment is pleasant for both the liar and the listener; lying to avoid work is quite tolerable and customary. But stealing from one's shipmates is unforgivable.

Late that night, while the Liar was on forward look-out watch, a solemn conference was held in the forecastle and decisions were reached in rough parliamentary fashion. A Council of five were ranged before the scuttle-butt, and the rest of the crew were watching from their bunks by the time the Liar was due off watch. Able was in the Council and the old seaman was their spokesman.

The Liar seemed to sense, when he came in out of the cold night wind, that something concerning him was afoot, for he made no silly diversionary manœuvres. He just took off his pea-jacket and watch cap and stepped out of his waterproof overalls; then he draped his plump, womanish arm round a bunk stanchion and waited.

The old seaman made it short. He cleared his throat with a whiskery growl and said, "Otto Rount, known hereabouts as the Liar, we think you're a goddamned pilferer. We think you stole a bunch o' gear off this ship at Honolulu, which was our last port, an' tuk it ashore an' sold it. That's what we think, isn't it, boys?" The wise heads of the Council nodded together.

"Therefore, Otto Rount, seein' as we think that way, here's what we expect you to do. We expect you to go to the Skipper when we get to Shanghai an' have him scratch you off the articles. Then we expect you to lash up an' get the hell ashore an' stay there. Isn't that what we expect, boys?" Again the Council nodded. "An' if you don't do what we expect, Mr. Liar, there's eighteen of us'll make your life hell clear from Shanghai to Frisco. That right, boys?" Nods. "All right. Liar, you got anuthin' t' say?"

Smooth-faced, Otto started, as though wakened from a bland dream of peace, and said, "Ah . . . Well now, boys, I just didn't do it. None of it. But O.K. You got your minds made up, O.K. I leave you at Shanghai. I'd like to see your faces when you find out who the real thief is, that's all." Then he turned and set about hanging up his foul-weather gear. To cover their embarrassment the members of the Council formed a closed game of Reilly's Eye, playing for toothpicks.

A week later the ship ascended the yellow, bankless Whang Pu, swung in the garbage-filled current, and moored alongside

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the outer wharf of the Shanghai waterfront. Inside, between the wharf and the quay, was a log jam of moored living-sampans, whose residents poked their heads out from below the mat-thatched cuddies to watch. By the time liberty was announced, virtually the whole crew of the ship was loitering promiscuously about the head of the gangway, waiting to jeer good-bye to the Liar.

As the Liar emerged from the forecastle companionway, lugging his hammock roll and his seabag, Able Baker said softly, more to himself than to the others, " I wonder how much of our gear he has in that bag right now." The thought spread with such malicious contagion that by the time the Liar reached the head of the gangway, eight ready pairs of hands reached out and relieved him of his duffel. Someone spread a boat tarpaulin out on the deck, and the contents of the bag were shaken out on it. The Liar retreated halfway down the gangway, reluctant to leave his goods yet equally reluctant to remain within arm's reach of these angry men.

On the tarpaulin, well mixed among the Liar's own things, was a regular slop-room of his shipmates' belongings: identification bracelets, lockets, pens, pencils, a beaded belt, one ear-ring, the ship's barber's clippers, and a pair of jade cuff links. Even the poker deck was there. There were shouts of " That's mine! . . . That, too! . . . Reach me that there belt," while the men scrambled about on the tarpaulin like children at a piñata party. After everyone had recovered his goods, Able quietly suggested they check the lashed-up hammock too, just in case. When they unrolled it, the men found three blankets and a silk shawl that did not belong there.

As the excitement died to a wondering mutter, the crew turned to the Liar, still standing undecided halfway down the gangway. The old seaman said, " You sure are a one! You oughter get hung. Come on. If you want what of this is yours, you'd better get up here an' get it."

The Liar licked his pale lips. " What're you going to do to me? "

" Nuthin'. Get on up here."

But the clever little carpenter had found a pot of red lead and a stiff little brush. When the Liar finally decided the men meant him no further harm, he came cautiously back aboard, passing through a narrow space in the line of glowering, happy men. The carpenter held up his paint pot and cried, " Look what I got, boys! "

At this signal the group closed around the Liar. There was a slight scuffle at the centre of the pile, and when the men parted

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and stepped back, the Liar was there stripped to his skivvy shorts, wearing THIEF painted boldly across his firm, plump chest. His face wore a set, bored expression as he began to repack his seabag to the roars of laughter of the crew.

As a change of entertainment, one of the snipes discovered how jolly it was to toss loose clothing over the rail onto the wharf, and soon everyone joined in the game. The Chinese on the wharf held their backsides and cheered, while their children ran out and stole what they dared. Everyone had a fine time.

The Liar, with some trouble, assembled a kit of wearable clothes and, carrying his much shrunken seabag, stalked ashore in silence, and disappeared in the direction of Bubbling Well Road.

When he was gone and the men were beginning to sink into their separate thoughts, the carpenter giggled and held up a fat money-belt. " I guess we'd better cut this up square. He don't seem t' be comin' back after it." But though most of the men participated in the division of the money, Able Baker withdrew and went to sit alone on the Number Three hatch, wondering whether they had been too severe.

Even now, ten years later, he was still wondering. A man of peace pushed too far, Able Baker was still unaccountably disturbed by his old rage and loathing for this nasty Liar.

Able shrugged and left the rail. Having had no supper, he took his square electric lantern and entered the stuffy, tunnel-like passage to the galley. He was not very hungry, but because the Captain had made neither mention of nor provision for his nourishment, Able felt that it was his duty as an undefeated man to forage on his own initiative. At the door to the galley he snapped the light switch twice before he remembered that all the ship's electrical circuits were dead, and that even to get light over the gangway he had had to tap power from the transformer on the wharf. So, circling his light cautiously before him, Able entered the galley, treading carefully on the wooden deck gratings which were strange to his feet.

He moved past the spectral Humpty Dumpty shapes of the steam cookers and round the bulk of the wooden meat block, and took from the tall, grey-painted refrigerator a quart of milk, in a waxen cardboard container, and two small hard peaches. He broke off a brittle chunk of margarine, shouldered the refrigerator door shut, and set everything on the greased steel top of the serving-table. Going for bread, he opened the tin-lined bread drawer and shone his light inside. Crouched there in frozen terror, open-eyed and whiskers working, was a large black rat.

" *Hoo!* " Hastily, and in profound revulsion, Able slammed

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the drawer and backed away from it. With fumbling fingers he gathered up the food from the slippery table and hurried out along the airless passage, tripping once over a small black hose which lay on deck.

Back at his watch desk, Able thought about all the rats on the ship now. He hated rats. "Comes of carrying grain," he muttered. Rats could live for years, and live fatly, on the hidden spillage in the tiny spaces around the holds. Able sighed and sat down in the watch chair with his food.

He had gracefully peeled half a peach, and was about to bite into it, when a human voice of eerie nearness startled him, and the fruit fell from his hand. Before it had rolled to the scupper, Able was rising from his chair with both hands planted on its arms, his scalp taut in alarm. He went to the rail and looked down to find what he had feared. It was the Liar come to pay a call.

The Liar was fatter now, and his skin looked tight and smooth and ready to split like a sausage. The Liar smiled and waved. "Able Baker," he called. "It's me, Otto."

"The Liar," Able said stupidly.

Still smiling, the other said, "Oh no. Not any more. I don't do that any more, Able."

"How've you been?" asked Able, for lack of anything better to say.

"Me? Fine, Able, just fine, thanks. Never better. Hey, I brought us something." Otto drew a half-pint of whisky from inside his tight suit. "They told me over at Peter Mai's you'd be here, so I brought us a little something for old times' sake." He started up the gangway.

"You can't come aboard. Nobody can come aboard." Able sidled over to bar the head of the gangway.

The Liar stopped. "Nobody? Nobody can come aboard?" He paused in thought a moment, then fished in his pocket, and brought out a scrap of white paper. He waved it towards Able. "I got a note here for you, old boy. From the Skipper. I met him in Mai's and he said as I was coming down to see you to take this along."

Able pulled at the lobe of his ear. "A note? Well, here, hand it up to me."

Otto came part way up the gangway, then stopped to look up over Able's head at the towering superstructure and bridge wings of the freighter. He seemed to plunge suddenly into a nostalgic reverie, and a look of sentimental sadness came over his round face. "The old ship," he breathed. "Hasn't changed hardly at all. Why, I remember every piece of her. That cargo mast

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there . . . those hatches . . . that foc'sle head where I used to stand watch . . ." The Liar began to climb the gangway again as he spoke, walking with slow, unsure steps, as if his feet had come to a separate life of their own and were leading him on without his knowledge. " And over there in the lee of the jolly-boat; that's where we used to sit around and chew the fat . . ."

Able's hand was still outstretched for the note as Otto reached the head of the gangway. But Otto, with his eyes fixed in the air on some point near the radio antenna, brushed by Able's extended arm and walked out on the main deck.

Able said, " The note . . . You're not supposed to be aboard, I told you. Let's have the note."

Otto's eyes came down out of the rigging. " The note? Well now, old boy, that's just a little joke. Here's the real note. From me to you." He plopped the half-pint of whisky into Able's hand. " Go on, open it."

Able's rage was rising. " You know I can't drink on watch! You said you had a note. Now, let's see it or get off my ship! "

The Liar raised his wispy eyebrows and said softly, " *Your* ship? *Your* ship? You forget. This is partly *my* ship, too. At least, I left a good deal of money an' clothes on her when I left. Don't you think that buys me a look-around? "

" That was a long time ago." Able was in anguish. " You deserved whatever you got then. Now, please, Otto, just be a good man and get on off. I don't want to have to get tough."

Otto stood by the rail in relaxed fashion, looking seriously at Able. " No, Able. You weren't ever that kind. You weren't ever one of the tough ones. You never bullied me like the rest of 'em . . . You wanta see something? Look here. I'll show you something you can tell the rest of 'em about." Otto unbuttoned his coat, then his shirt, and pulled up the front of his undershirt. There, written faintly across his smooth, hairless chest, was the word THIEF. " Isn't that something? The brush that little carpenter used was very stiff, Able, and my skin is very thin. The red paint got in and stayed." Otto pulled down the undershirt, and as he buttoned his outer shirt, Able caught sight of a small revolver in a holster at Otto's belt.

Fear drums began to beat in Able's head. He said, " I'm sorry about that, Otto, but I didn't have anything to do with it."

" No, I recollect you didn't. That's what I said. You were never one of the tough ones . . . Why, I see a big hole in the butt of your gun there. There isn't any clip in it. Did you forget to put one in? No. You did it on purpose. You never did like a loaded gun, did you? You're a good man, Able. Really too good for the rest of these monkeys."

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Able suddenly felt very stupid and ineffectual. "Otto, I'm not supposed to let anybody aboard. Now, just go, would you?"

Otto seemed not to have heard. He said, "I've got something else to show you, too." From an inside pocket of his coat he drew a flat, Manila-bound bundle of papers. After looking around for a place to spread them out and finding none close by, he thrust the bundle out before him in his fat hands and, looking over his shoulder at Able, followed the bundle to the log desk as though it were pulling him. He untied the dirty string which held it together and spread the contents out on the open deck log.

Able stood unmoving by the rail, weakened to immobility by the horrifying course events had taken. His ears felt to him as though they were blushing at the lobes, and his stomach was watery. For want of something more positive to do, Able walked stiffly over to the log desk when the other had retreated from it, and bent over the newspaper clippings spread out on the log.

Each of the clippings detailed a wharfside ship robbery. MUELLER LINES SHIP LOOTED—GUARD BOUND . . . ANOTHER WATERFRONT LOOTING . . . Able finally managed to arrange his throat for speech: "What's all this stuff?"

Otto smiled. "That's my references, you might say. Just like as if I was coming to you for employment, you see. I pitched all those jobs myself, Able. All by myself."

Able felt a chilling cramp in his bowels. "Is that why you came down here now?"

Otto returned to the log desk and drummed on the clippings with fluttering, ataxic fingers. "Well, in a manner of speaking, yes." He pointed at the clippings. "Look here, now. Says all them watchmen an' guards was overpowered an' tied up. Well, just between you an' I, they wasn't tied up till *after* I'd cleaned out the cabins! See? Every one of 'em helped me, more or less; then I tied 'em up afterwards to make it all look right. Now—er—I'm no tightwad, Able. You know me. I split fair, I do. Fifty-fifty, that's what it'll be for us. Half for you an' half for me tomorrow night, after I turn the stuff. You can't be fairer than that, now can you?"

Able Baker's head felt light and he clung to the edge of the log desk while he regarded Otto with a dumbly opaque look. I'm the biggest fool in Christendom, he thought. Wonder if I could get the clip out of there and in the gun in time.

Uncannily, Otto chose that very moment to say, "By the way, Able, old boy, where's the clip for that gun of yours?"

Nearly fainting, Able pointed to the log desk. Otto reached in and found it and casually dropped it over the side. Just two men in this silent, dead world heard its soft, far splash.

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Able said in a choked voice, "Er—how much d'you make doing something like this?"

Otto's eyes quoted his anticipatory greed, and he bit his fat thumb knuckle while he speculated, "Oh, let's see. Ship like this . . . Prob'ly get eight, nine hunnerd for everything; that's the navigation instruments an' the chronometer an' stop-watches an' the barometer, plus all the little junk in the officers' cabins like watches an' rings an' so on. Half for you makes four hunnerd, four-fifty, for not doin' nothing but watchin', while I'm inside, an' warnin' me if somebody comes by, an' then lettin' me tie you up afterwards. That's all."

"I don't like it," Able said. "Suppose somebody comes. Then what? It's both our necks."

"O.K., somebody comes. You ring the bell there—the one that repeats in all the compartments—an' I lay low till it's safe to get ashore again. Simple, see?"

Able went on in a strangely dull voice, "I would have to get the instruments for you. You wouldn't know where to find them, and you'd mess the chart-room up hunting round."

"Great! That'd be a real help. I might say that's a fine idea. I'll wait just inside this door here while you go up an' bring down all the stuff."

Able Baker turned away, then hesitated, and said, "Are you sure you want to go through with this?"

"Am I sure? Whadda you think I'm here for?"

"All right," Able sighed, and he lumbered aft towards the ladder leading up to the bridge deck.

When Able had climbed up to the wing of the bridge he leaned on the rail and paused to catch his breath. For a moment he thought he was going to be sick. No one could help him now.

He undogged the watertight door and stepped over the flange into the gloom of the wheelhouse. He switched on his lantern and walked aft through the wheelhouse, past the silent, dark radio-room and into the chart-room.

Hunting with the beam of the light, he found a chart chest of appropriate size and emptied its contents of rolled charts onto the big, high table. Then, moving tiredly, he passed about the compartment gathering instruments as he had been told. Three stop-watches, two sextants in their gumwood boxes, the polished brass aneroid barometer taken from the bulkhead; all these Able laid gently into the chart chest. Then he propped his lantern to throw light down on the table, opened the mahogany lid of the chronometer case, slid its cover glass aside, and locked the gimbals that floated the mechanism. Then he closed it all up, and

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this, too, he put in the chart chest. Lord, tell me what to do. No. Pardon me, that's not what I meant. Just tell me what I'm doing is O.K. Please?

Able Baker closed the lid of this chest he had filled with the ship's instruments and, taking it by the end handles, lifted it down. As he stepped towards the door he trod on a small rubber hose which lay on the deck, and as it rolled under his shoe he heard a metallic tinkle.

He set the box down and traced the hose with his lantern beam until he found the small bronze pedestal nozzle which terminated it. It had upset and was lying on its side, so he righted it, then picked up the chest of instruments again, and went out the way he had entered.

Out on the wing of the bridge he had to put down the chest again while he dogged the watertight door. He put all his weight on each dog handle, wrenching it as tightly as he could to make the door take the seal. He was sweating now from his exertion and from the dead closeness of the air in the compartments he had just quitted. Because the box was heavy, Able had to descend the ladder backwards, bringing the box down one tread at a time.

Otto slipped out of the shadows of the passageway and said, "Surely, you took long enough!"

Able Baker was panting, "I had to lock—the gimbals of th'—chronometer to keep it from spilling out—and breaking."

"Hmm . . . What's all those hoses doing all over the place?"

"Hoses?"

"Sure, hoses. Look there. No. Shine your light over. There. See there?"

Able's light showed numerous heaps of overlapping coils of thin black hose arranged in rough geometry by the hatch of Number Three hold. Squatting among the coils like a chromium-plated spider was a fitting-studded manifold to which all the hoses were connected. Able hesitated. "*Those* hoses. It's some idea of the underwriters to find out how much fuel-oil fumes'll collect inside a ship when the ventilators aren't going."

"Huh . . . Well. All right, now, if somebody comes you hit that bell button three times an' I'll duck. You're not lookin' for anybody back aboard, are you?"

"No officers, anyway. The men never go into the deck-house."

"O.K., then. I'll just get going." Otto wiped his nose with the back of his hand and disappeared in the passageway.

Able followed him to the watertight door. "Look," he said softly into the darkness, "I'd better shut this door just in case."

"All right," Otto said, and switched on his small flashlight.

Able Baker swung the heavy door shut; then, with a swamper

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bar which he took from its mounts on the bulkhead, he tightened each of the six door dogs in turn, bearing down with all the additional leverage of the two-foot extension tool. Then, trotting nimbly and silently, he ran all the way round the deck-house until he came to the closed watertight door at the opposite end of the passage Otto had entered. He slipped the swamper bar over each of its dog handles, bringing them up gasket-tight. When he was done he stepped back and took off his glasses and began wiping the sweat from his face with a bandanna.

His hand hesitated as he gasped in the alarm of sudden remembrance; then he ran aft to the galley service door he had forgotten, and tightened all the dogs on it also.

Then, swinging the swamper bar with his stride, he strolled back round the deck-house trying to remember the words to *Bill Bailey*. Because all he had ever learnt was the bass part with all its contrapuntal ellipses, he had to fumble in his memory for the proper melody—*Bill Bai—lee, won't you please come home? Bill Bai—lee, won't you please come home? I'll do . . . de cookin', I'll pay de rent-mah-honey. Dum da dum ti do dee do! Fuff!* His voice was hoarse and trembling.

As he replaced the swamper bar in its mounts his knees suddenly felt as though they were giving way, and he had to sit down quickly in the canvas chair. He straightened and leaned sideways and tugged at the chain of his heavy gold watch.

2140. Able leaned back in his chair and cocked his head to listen to the speaking-tubes. Of the five tubes, one descended to the engine-room, one went up to the wheelhouse, and the remaining three went into the officers' cabins. An occasional small sound of movement came from one of the latter, and by putting his ear to each in turn, Able determined that the Liar was then looting the First Mate's cabin.

Able leaned his head back against the cold bulkhead and tried closing his eyes to make the time pass more swiftly. Then, unable to resist, he looked at his watch again. 2142.

The words began to come back, and he sang them studiously: *Won't you . . . come home, Bill Bai—lee? Won't you . . . come home? She moans de whole day lo—ong.*

Please, Lord, make them hurry.

Able Baker looked at his watch. 2143. He pushed the watch back in his pocket, determined not to look at it again for five whole minutes. A sound came over Able's shoulder.

"Ssssssst! Say, Able, is that you singing?"

"Yes," Able whispered.

"Well, quit it. It makes me nervous."

"All right," Able answered. But, because he had made such

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a good beginning, and because it somehow had become very important to finish the song, he soon began again sotto voce: *I know I'se to blame. Now ain't dat a sha—ame? Bill Bailey, won't you please come ho—ome?*

The Liar's voice came out of the speaking-tube again. " Hey! I'm all done now. Is it all clear out there? "

Able Baker stood up and looked past the flare of the ship's bows towards the land end of the wharf. A truck had just turned onto the wharf from the brick street.

" Yes," Able said, watching the lights of the truck stream down the wharf. " It's all right."

The truck stopped at the foot of the gangway and three men in overalls got out. They carried gauntlets and wore plastic skull-caps. They stood a moment by the truck conferring, while one of the men, evidently the boss, looked from the ship to a clipboard he held on his arm.

Able Baker could hear straining and scuffling sounds on the other side of the watertight door he had dogged so tightly. Then the sounds stopped, and a moment later Otto's voice came again, breathy and hollow, from the mouth of the speaking-tube. " Say, Able, what'd you do to that door, anyway? I can't get it open."

Able went to the mouth of the tube. " You'll have to wait, now," he whispered. " There's some men coming aboard. It won't be long. I'll call you when they're gone."

" God damn."

Able Baker walked to the head of the gangway to meet the men coming up. Each carried over his shoulder a bulky red-and-white-striped cylinder. The boss, from whose belt swung the clipboard, said, " Good evening. You Chief Baker? "

" Yes," Able said, and he shone his light on the glittering manifold lying among the coiled hoses. " Right there."

The men put down their cylinders near the manifold and straightened up to pull the load aches out of their shoulders. The boss said, " Everything shut off below? No power on at all? "

Able Baker shook his head. " The auxiliary is shut down. We're getting power for this light off the pier there."

" Pilot lights out in the evaporators? "

" Yes."

" Everyone else off? We ought to tour all the compartments, but we're running late. Anybody but you aboard? "

" N-no."

" I have to sign the deck log. That it over there? "

Able nodded and gestured weakly towards it. While the boss went to the log desk, Able, powerless to move, remained where he was, wondering whether the speaking-tube would say something.

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The boss bent and examined the watch list and the Ship's Company Board. All the little brass disks save Able's were hanging in the column headed *Ashore.* The boss initialled the deck log, noting down the time, and turned away.

The speaking-tube had remained silent. Able breathed again.

The boss went forward to the manifold where the other two men were making up hose-and-gage connections, and stood to windward watching them tighten the last joints. He spoke to Able, " Well, you better ring your alarm. You got power on it? "

Able nodded. " The alarm is on batteries."

" Most of them are, I guess," the boss said. " Oh, did you get all the navigation instruments out of the ship? Your skipper wanted me to remind you to get the chronometer out, too. He said he had one ruined once this way."

With phlegm in his throat, Able said, " Everything is in that chest over there. It'll be all right there, won't it? "

" That'll be O.K. Go hit the bell and we'll get started."

Able Baker walked with a stumping gait back to the log desk and pushed the alarm-bell button three long times. The speaking-tube said in a tiny voice, " Hey, Able. Hey. What's going on out there? What's them cans those guys brought with 'em? I seen 'em through the porthole glass. What's going on? "

Able did not answer. He again pushed the button three times. The whole ship seemed to ring, but mutely.

" Hey, Able, can you hear me? " The Liar's voice was tense and low.

Able Baker, the podgy, sad, grey-haired old man, took a big wad of cotton waste from the log desk and, tearing it into tufts, stuffed each of the five bell mouths of the speaking-tubes. His shoulders sagged as he stood back to look at his work; then he turned and shuffled forward to where the three men were standing by their cylinders.

Soberly, the boss said, " O.K.," and each of the overall-clad men turned his valve smartly. There was a hissing, and the coils of hose all stirred slightly.

It does not matter how many times they have done it before; the men in a fumigating crew always fall silent as they turn hundreds of pounds of hydrocyanic-acid gas into a sealed, dead ship, out of respect for all the lives they can feel winking out beneath their feet.

★ ★ ★

PLEASE WEAR TAILS?

Peacocks wanted for banquet—Advertisement in *The Sunday Times*

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★ *Have you ever wondered why a menu is always in French? Gallico cooks up the answer*

HUSH PUPPY

BY PAUL GALLICO

IF there is one thing longed for by the average honest, middle-class Frenchman even more than a competence for his old age, it is to wear the rosette of the Legion of Honour.

By virtue of his diligence and superb mastery of his art, plus the caution and thrift of Madame, his faithful partner through life, Monsieur Armand Bonneval, Cordon Bleu chef and Honorary Member of the Académie Culinaire de France, retired, and now owner of the Auberge Château Loiret, was reasonably secure for his declining years.

The supreme decoration of France, however, had eluded him. Nor was his position in such a modest village as Loiret on the placid Loire, even though it was on the trail of the tourists visiting the châteaux in the summer, likely to bring him the prominence that might result in such a coveted reward.

But one could always hope, and each time the stout and greying little chef read of the cross and rosette having been bestowed upon some scientist or man of letters, he would sigh, not with envy but longing. And Madame Bonneval, as rotund as he, clad in honest cashier's black, seated at her accounts in her tiny office off the foyer of the Auberge, would comfort him with, "It is you who deserve it if any one does."

"It is for your sake even more than mine," Bonneval once said, glancing down at his immaculate white jacket almost as though the rosette were already looming in his buttonhole. "When we went for a promenade and the decoration was admired, everyone would look to see this paragon of a wife who had assisted her husband to such eminence."

"Ah Armand! I do not need any ribbon to convince me of your worth!"

Yet the yearning remained, even after the extraordinary piece of good fortune of their holiday trip to the United States. This was the gift of an impetuous Texas oil millionaire steered to the

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Auberge by the famous Guide Michelin's rating of four crossed spoons-and-forks and two stars.

After a delicious dinner he fell into conversation with the little chef, saying, " Boy, that was a mighty tasty meal, I don't mind telling you. But we got some mighty fine cookin' back home too. You ever eat barbecued spare ribs? "

Bonneval indicated politely that he had not.

" What? Don't tell me you never had a real southern fish fry with hush-puppies, or hot jowl with collard greens and pot likker? "

Baffled, Bonneval shook his head.

" Why, monsoor," cried the Texan, " you jes' ain't never lived. You and Madame gotta come over and be my guests. We got the finest cookin' in the world in the U.S.A."

Have you ever encountered a Texas oil millionaire suffering from an aggravated fit of hospitality? They have not only the necessary persuasiveness, but also the cash. The result was that when Monsieur and Madame Bonneval closed the Auberge as they always did from January to April, they embarked at the expense of the millionaire upon a coast-to-coast gastronomic tour of the United States.

And the interesting part was that Monsieur Bonneval discovered that the Texan was quite right. For the chef was too great an artist himself with the skillet and saucepan to be a chauvinist. He greeted and acknowledged perfection where he encountered it. And he was enthralled by some of the recipes and dishes he discovered in America.

However, upon their return, life resumed its normal tenor, and his ambition to achieve the final honour to crown his career remained strong.

Now there is this about an honestly conducted auberge that is starred by Michelin, namely, that you serve many hundreds of people in a month; they arrive; they order; they consume; they call for the bill, and depart, and you do not know whom you have entertained, satisfied, or even charmed.

One day a letter arrived at the Auberge, out of the blue, that sent Bonneval and Madame into an absolute hysteria of excitement and happiness.

It was on the headed paper of the Cercle Intime des Grands Gourmets de France—in other words, that sacrosanct inner circle of all the gastronomic organizations of the country, those supreme knights of the œsophagus and the gizzard, formed of the most sensitive and exclusive overeaters of a nation devoted to defying indigestion on many fronts. The missive read as follows:

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AS you may know, this Club tenders an annual banquet to His Excellency the President of France, and for which each year a French Chef of outstanding accomplishment is selected to compose the menu and cook the dinner.

Not long ago, the Duc de C. happened to dine at your Auberge while en route. A member of this Club, he has professed himself an admirer of your art, he has forwarded such an unstinted and glowing report of your accomplishments, and such is his influence in our Club, that you have been unanimously nominated for the post of Chef du Cercle for this year's dinner.

Write us that you accept, cher Maître Bonneval, and send us at once your menu and choice of dishes so that it may be printed and given to the Press in advance of the banquet which is next month. You are, of course, aware that the entire responsibility for the dinner will be yours, and once you have made your choice no one has the right to challenge or to change your decisions . . .

Monsieur and Madame Bonneval read and reread this eloquent letter with tears streaming down their faces and then embraced one another. For the selection as Chef to the Cercle Intime for the annual banquet tendered to the President and a few members of the Corps Diplomatique almost automatically carries with it the coveted award of the Cross of the Legion of Honour.

" My dear husband, I am so happy for you," wept Madame Bonneval. " Now at last your true genius has been recognized."

" Oh, would that I were indeed worthy," cried Bonneval in a seizure of becoming modesty, " and could somehow give something extra in return for this great honour that has come to me."

And then, like lightning from the sky, compounded in part from his deep sense of gratitude and the memory of his recent visit to the vast and fruitful land across the sea, an idea struck Monsieur Bonneval. The idea embraced how he might be the instrument to perform a good work, earn his decoration, and at the same time demonstrate his gratitude to the generous host from Dallas who had made it possible for him to learn the culinary secrets of the Texans with their chilis and enchiladas, the Alabamans with their fritures, the New Englanders with their soups and dumplings, the Idahoians who produced a fabulous pomme de terre, the Californians who roasted meat in a charcoal pit.

" Maman! " he shouted to his spouse, who was already seeing the receipts in the black japanned cash-box doubled once her husband wore the red rosette, " do you know what I shall do? I shall combine all that I have learnt on our recent trip and cook

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a United States dinner for the President of France, thus proving my skill and originality as well as cementing Franco-American relations. Will this not constitute a sensation?"

"Perhaps it might be wiser . . ." began Madame Bonneval, but then concluded, "Prepared by you, I am sure that it will be a most wonderful repast." Had the chef not been so gripped by excitement and pleased with his marvellous notion, he would have seen that her reply was slightly less than enthusiastic. Often women have a fatal intuition . . .

Shortly after, Monsieur Bonneval, having accepted the invitation, forwarded to the Cercle his menu, consisting of ten courses and demi-courses spreading from New England to the Mexican border, bounded on the east by the Atlantic and the west by the Pacific ocean.

A secretary acknowledged receipt of this novel and interesting bill of fare and confirmed June 15th as the date at the Ritz in Paris. He noted also that, although this was likewise the occasion of the annual dinner at the same hotel of the Chantilly Hunt Club, an organization devoted to the chase and supported by wealthy British and American sportsmen currently residing in the charming area of Chantilly, there would be no interference. The Ritz would provide Monsieur Bonneval with his own kitchen and all the assistance he needed.

And in due course, also, there appeared at the Auberge Château Loiret a scruffy-looking reporter from a Paris paper with dirty cuffs and even dirtier fingernails. In France, it is not unusual for representatives of the Press to appear in less than immaculate condition. Hence, Monsieur Bonneval was neither on his guard nor, in his innocence of the world, aware that this specimen was filled with the gall, wormwood, and general overflow of malevolence characteristic of his affiliations.

The fellow named his paper which meant nothing to Monsieur Bonneval whose reading was confined chiefly to a sheet giving intimate details of the love and home life of bicycle-race riders. The reporter then said, "I have seen the menu you have presented for the annual capitalistic orgy of—that is to say, the Fête des Gourmets of the Cercle, and wish an interview."

"But of course, mon vieux," replied the unsuspecting Bonneval. "Ask me what you wish to know and all shall be made clear."

"This idea of presenting North American dishes . . ."

"Ah yes. An American millionaire from the famous state of Fort Dallas, in the country of Texas, invited me there. In gratitude to him and this great nation that is aiding us so nobly

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in combating the evils of communism, I shall cook United States."

The reporter coughed, produced a crumpled cigarette from a soiled packet, extracted a frayed vesta, and lit it. Then, consulting Bonneval's menu from a mimeographed sheet, he asked, "This strange item here in the middle of the repast called the Hush-puppy, what is that?"

"Oh, oh! The Hush-puppy! This is a most famous and extraordinary food of the inhabitants of the city of Florida in Tallahassee where I have visited."

"Indeed. How, for instance, would you translate this dish?"

Monsieur Bonneval reflected. "To be exact," he replied, "it would be called 'Tais-toi, petit chien.' Is not that adorable?"

"Quite," agreed the reporter. "But what is it, and how did it come by this astonishing name?"

"Ah, ah!" said the delighted Bonneval. "Well may you ask. It is the most touching of stories. It is a dough comprising white maize flour, baking-powder, salt, milk, water, and a large chopped onion, and fried in the fat devoted to a friture of native fishes . . ."

"Yes, yes, but the origin of the name," pressed the reporter.

"I was arriving at that," said Monsieur Bonneval. "It is the custom in the Southland after the hunt or the fishing to gather about the campfire for a fish fry. There the hunters relate exaggerated tales to themselves and their faithful negro retainers with their dogs of the hound variety who sit around the outer edge of the firelit circle of the camp where the evening meal is cooking.

"The odour of the food frequently excites the younger animals in charge of the darkies, causing them to make the disturbance with barks and whines. Then one of the hunters detaches a piece of this marvellous maize-and-onion cake fried in the fish fat, and hurls it to the animal, saying softly, 'Hush, puppy. Be quiet, little one!' The satisfaction of this food, it is said, is miraculous, and once a beast has engulfed a portion of it, no further sound emerges from him, and thus the evening's entertainment may proceed without further disturbance. Is this not a beautiful custom?"

"Quite," said the reporter and, having pumped Monsieur Bonneval a little more, permitted the friendly little chef to treat him to a meal and a bottle of wine, and then departed for Paris.

The storm broke three days later.

It began, of course, in a communist paper with a story headlined: U.S. INSULT TO FRANCE! *Gesture of Contempt! Native chef*

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bribed to give French President mixture fed to dogs of negro slaves in Florida Concentration Camp!

The radical socialists, fearful that the communists had got hold of something this time, took it up, as did the parties of the centre and the right.

The menu composed for the Cercle by Monsieur Bonneval, which had previously been ignored by the Press, was now published in every newspaper with stinging comment, and editorials reflecting all political and cultural shades and opinions.

FRENCH CHIEF OF STATE TO DINE ON DOG BISCUITS, trumpeted one. DISHES OF THE SAVAGE INDIANS OF THE MOUNTAINS OF TEXAS FOR FRANCE'S PRESIDENT, headlined another. HAS BONNEVAL BEEN BOUGHT? asked a third. *Can it then indeed be true*, inquired a fourth, *that it is seriously proposed at the annual banquet of the sacrosanct Cercle to compel the elected head of the French Nation to consume a drugged cake used to calm hysterical hounds belonging to the uncivilized inhabitants of a still barbarous portion of the United States?*

The Gaullists took the nationalist line and demanded to know since when the classic French cuisine had not been good enough for Frenchmen. The socialists wrote of further evidence of expanding imperialism and interference with the internal affairs of France.

Bonneval was denounced as a traitor in the Assembly, the first time the members of that body apparently agreed on anything: there were repercussions at the Quai d'Orsay, and the ripples eventually reached the State Department in Washington, causing a query to be cabled to the staff of the American Ambassador in Paris.

Poor Bonneval found himself plunged into a sheer hell of notoriety. He was badgered by the Press. Hordes of reporters descended upon peaceful Loiret. He was the recipient of petitions and blackguarding letters and was subjected to abuse and pressure of every kind.

The Cercle itself, consisting for the most part of aristocrats and professional people disinterested in politics, took a strong line and issued a statement to the effect that the banquet was traditional, and once the chef was selected, the entire responsibility for the menu remained with him. The Club would in no circumstances interfere.

But this left Bonneval alone to weather the tempest, buffeted hither and thither. He was no reed, however, but a man of courage and considerable stubbornness. He knew himself and his intentions to have been honourable, the dishes superb; he was a Frenchman and independent, and he refused to budge.

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And of course, as the pressure and fury redoubled, all hope of his Legion of Honour faded, since the President would not dare award it in the circumstances. Indeed, the police claimed to have discovered a plot to bomb the hotel.

The harassed chef had one silent supporter in the person of a former American Ambassador, guest of honour at the dinner, a cultured and patient man, who diplomatically refrained from taking any part in this controversy. But privately he remarked to his wife, " By George, the little fellow has courage. If he serves that dinner I'll see that he's recommended for a decoration from the U.S.A. if it's the last thing I do."

But the unhappy affair was taking its toll. With all the concentrated venom turned against him, the unfortunate chef began to lose some of his comfortable rotundity. Worry and lack of sleep drained the cheerful stoveside red from his face.

But the dignity of Monsieur Bonneval under these attacks was something splendid to see as he stood firm on his decision to present the best dishes of France's old friend and ally from across the sea. His physical as well as moral courage was an example, so much so that a few more daring souls even began to speak up in defence of his rights.

And then, suddenly and inexplicably, Monsieur Bonneval yielded.

At first the news was received with astonishment and scepticism until it proved to be true, confirmed by the Cercle. The pressures had apparently been too much for Bonneval to bear, and giving in, he had presented a substitute menu in honest French for the President's banquet.

Most saddened by this news was the guest of honour, so much so that he almost cancelled his acceptance to the invitation to the dinner but, on second thoughts and the persuasion of his wife, reconsidered.

The communists crowed; the Gaullists exulted; the socialists pointed with pride. And only two people really knew what final straw had proved too much for the back of this stout little culinary camel. It had been none other than Madame Bonneval.

Unable any longer to bear the spectacle of her gallant husband withering away before her eyes, she had said to him a week before the date of the affair, " Armand, I beg of you. Do what they wish. You cannot hold out against all of France."

" Never! No one may dictate what I, Armand Bonneval, shall cook! "

" Armand, my husband, do this for me. I cannot bear these attacks any longer. I shall have a breakdown."

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Bonneval regarded his wife long and fondly. "There is no power on earth could make me give in but you," he said finally.

"Oh Armand! Do you promise?" Madame was deeply touched, for she knew that never had a greater compliment been paid her.

"Very well, then. I promise."

"Ah! I am so happy. See, I did it only for you. Now you will receive your Legion of Honour. In the end you would have regretted losing it, besides making yourself ill."

"Wretched woman, what have you done?" cried Bonneval. "I should never have yielded for myself. Give me back my promise."

But this Madame refused to do, insisting it was true that the strain was too much for her, and in the end Bonneval went into the little office and mused upon the devious ways of women. Then, suddenly, with a curiously intense expression on his countenance, and removing his chef's cap for greater freedom of thought, he penned the substitute menu and sent it off to Paris.

I have a copy of it before me and reproduce it as it appeared in all the French newspapers:

Bouillabaisse aux Palourdes de Normandie à la Crème
Saumon de Loire Diable sous la Cendre, Sauce de l'Enfer

Entrailles de Jeune Porc à la Bama
Feuilles de Navet au Lard
Quenelles de Maïs blanc au Pays fleuri

Poulet de Bresse, Terre Marie
Pommes de terre de Sénégal douces à la sucre
Soufflé Indien

Salade rouge d'Avocats

Gâteau au Courge

You have, no doubt, read in your newspapers of the tremendous success of the banquet of the Cercle and of the cheers that echoed for the great chef who cooked it. But you will not know about the strange affair of the disturbance next door, plus the astonishing behaviour of the American guest of honour.

The matter of the interference from the adjoining banquet-hall will remain your secret and mine when I have revealed it, but there were several in the vicinity of the former American Ambassador when he seemed to be in the grip of an unfortunate seizure of near apoplexy who declared that his difficulty appeared to be, as the dinner progressed, to keep from laughing himself to death.

But first we should glance backstage to the special kitchen of the Ritz where guest chef Armand Bonneval, like Toscanini con-

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ducting without a score, created his fabulous banquet wholly from memory and without referring to any text.

Refusing all assistance provided in the form of fryers, sauce-makers, and junior cooks, he buzzed about the kitchen, a veritable dynamo of energy, whipping salt pork, minced clams, potatoes, onions, and cream into the wonderful bouillabaisse, with his own hands preparing the hot sauce containing onion, ketchup, vinegar, Worcester sauce, various peppers, paprika, and chili powder for the charcoal-grilled salmon, and crisping the long, sausage-shaped quenelles in the fat wherein frizzled the fascinating dish of swine's intestines flavoured with cloves and chopped red peppers.

With deft touch and loving care he golden-browned the tender Bresse chicken sections, concocting the thick cream gravy to pour over them. To the tubers imported from French Africa he added honey, orange-juice, and brown sugar; he took particular care with the vegetable pudding and the avocado salad, and lavished attention upon the sweet, browning in the oven.

Marvellous odours, rich and spicy, filled the kitchen and were wafted out to the two banqueting-rooms beyond, the one where the Cercle waited hungrily and next door where the Chantilly Hunt Club was likewise dining in great state, formal pink coats and all.

Reports tell how the members of the Cercle were enthralled by the very first dish, the wonderful soup concocted by their guest chef; they began to applaud with the appearance of the fish course with its new and marvellous sauce, and their enthusiasm knew no bounds with the arrival of the pork dish accompanied by the quenelles, the like of which, for flavour, they had never tasted before.

Tears were shed over the chicken course with its accessories of fabulous potatoes and extraordinary soufflé. Excitement mounted to fever pitch with the unusual salad, and when the fragrant, mahogany-brown, spicy Gâteau au Courge appeared, the dignified members of the Cercle, stuffed to the eyebrows, were prepared to carry Maître Bonneval in triumph upon their shoulders.

However, this had to wait upon the address of the President of the nation and the summoning of the guest chef to the banquet-room to receive the plaudits of the members and France's highest honour.

It was at this moment, just as the Toast-master announced: " Messieurs, le Président de la République," that the disturbance next door broke out, precipitating a crisis such as not even the oldest member of the Cercle could recall.

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For as the Chief of State rose to his feet, several dozen hounds, collected in the hall without, gave tongue simultaneously in shrill whines, barkings, yappings, yelps, and shrieks. It was the famous Chantilly Pack being brought to the banquet for the annual ceremony of being blessed by the Bishop of Chantilly.

Held in leash outside the banquet-hall in the foyer, they gave tongue vociferously in both French and English, while the President of France stood on his feet, unable to hear himself think, much less speak, and the Chairman and members of the Cercle turned crimson with embarrassment. No one knew what to do. There seemed nothing to be done to save the situation.

But attend! Likewise outside the door, up to his knees in baying beagles, there waited one who was also in possession of a tremendous secret. It was none other than Monsieur Armand Bonneval ready to be called inside to take his bow. He saw the impasse. He realized the solution. For him, to see and to know were to act.

"Vite! vite!" he called to an assistant nearby. "Bring the quenelles! Run! Fetch the remaining quenelles at once!"

The assistant ran. He returned with a huge dish heaped high with crispy, fragrant, brown, sausage-shaped cakes. Bonneval seized them and flung them by handfuls to the screaming Chantilly pack. "Taisez-vous, méchants chiens!" he cried.

The animals flung themselves upon the succulent offerings. They gobbled. And a moment later, nothing but silence, golden silence, broken only by almost inaudible canine snufflings of joy, filled the foyer and banqueting-rooms.

The President commenced his speech; ten minutes later Monsieur Bonneval made his entrance to be greeted with a standing ovation and ringing cheers as the distinguished new member of France's Légion d'Honneur.

And outside in the hall, a baffled negro kennel boy in the employ of an American film man, owner of the Chantilly Pack, fingered one of the golden-brown, sausage-length cakes and, shaking his head, said, "He called 'em quenelles, but dey looks like, dey smells like, dey tastes like, and dey sure enough *acts* like good old-fashioned Tallahassee Hush-puppies . . ."

Ah yes. By now you will have guessed what that wicked Monsieur Bonneval had done to avenge himself upon his tormentors, evade the promise extracted by his wife, and maintain the dignity of a chef of the Grand Cordon Bleu, retired, to whom nobody tells anything about what he shall or shall not cook.

But if not, you will only have to imagine yourself a mouse at a quiet and almost secret investiture in the American Embassy,

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where Monsieur Armand Bonneval was decorated with the U.S. medal of the Legion of Merit, the citation reading in part: *For courage in the face of great adversity and an unexampled demonstration of supreme friendship for the United States of America.*

For, being the only American present at this exclusive feast of the Cercle, none but the Ambassador, who had been born in Alabama, educated in the Midwest, attended Harvard Law School, and practised law on the Pacific Coast, was aware of the true nature of the French-sounding repast prepared by Monsieur Bonneval.

Picture the diplomat's joy, for instance, when the bouillabaisse arrived and he found himself eating the finest Boston clam chowder to be had outside Gallagher's Fish House on South Market Street. Imagine his delight at next being presented with Barbecued Salmon with Round-Up Barbecue Sauce, as it is prepared in the Columbia River section of the North-west, where the big Sockeyes run, followed by Alabama hog chit'lins with turnip greens, pot likker, and genuine Florida-style Hush-puppies.

His enchantment, amusement, and affection for the little chef grew with the appearance of Maryland fried chicken with cream sauce, candied yams, and old-fashioned southern-style corn pudding, was augmented by the good red Gaucamole the way they used to make it in Monterey, and climaxed by the appearance of the famous Gâteau au Courge, which any French dictionary and a little imagination and skill translates into good old New England pumpkin pie.

None of the above, of course, appeared in the citation; the ex-Ambassador never mentioned it to anyone, nor did Bonneval ever breathe a word, not even after his red rosette was securely implanted in his buttonhole.

Nevertheless, the facts have somehow managed to leak out and appear in this space, unfortunately or fortunately as you may care to look at it, considering that great delicacy, the Tallahassee Hush-puppy, has probably made its last appearance in la belle France.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Opposites.* 10, *Well-worn.* 11, *Pretender.* 12, *Ripeness.* 13, *Minorca.* 14, *Bluebird.* 15, *Glutinous.* 22, *Liverwort.* 23, *Trial run.* 24, *Pug-nose.* 25, *Alkaloid.* 27, *False arch.* 28, *Thatched.* 29, *Road sense.*

Down. 2, *Particle.* 3, *Outposts.* 4, *Innocent.* 5, *Ewer.* 6, *Serials.* 7, *Sleeves.* 8, *Polemic.* 9, *An aside.* 14, *Burin.* 16, *Repulsed.* 17, *Swan Lake.* 18, *Trisects.* 19, *Straits.* 20, *Sick-bay.* 21, *Elf-lock.* 22, *Lucifer.* 26, *Dado.*

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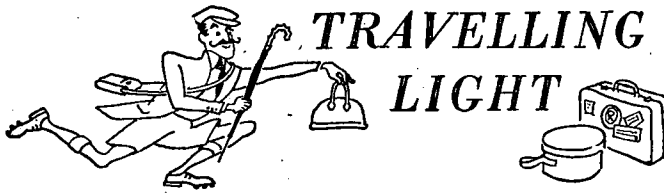

TRAVELLING LIGHT

Romance! Those first-class passengers
they like it very well

RUDYARD KIPLING

If any future, Love, were sure
Be ours to hear with rapture pure
Like "Open Sesame" resounding:
Messieurs les voyageurs en voiture.

And, Ah, those sacred wheels that say
Their Non sporgersi *all the way,*
In stern beloved trilingual measure
Nicht hinauslehnen *night or day.*

What shall we find with dawn begun
And Europe's black effacement done?
Beyond Vallorbe the Alps arising?
The bridge at Avignon in the sun?

FRANCES CORNFORD, *Lines on Foreign Travel*

Innocent Abroad

"Mercy, it's getting quite out of hand," said Hortense, and clung tightly to Gino. "Whatever would have happened to me without you?" I wondered. There were other women on the streets, but they, according to Gino, were not from Marino. The men hooted and jeered them. "It seems to me the men are behaving shockingly," Hortense said.

"For a young woman to appear at a *sagra* is to cast away her good name," Gino said.

"Mercy!" said Hortense. "Whatever do they think of me?"

"That you are without morals," Gino said. "They know that you are a tourist and it is what they believe of all Anglo-Saxon women, so they are not surprised to see you. The Italian girls are from Rome and they are not surprised to see them either,

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for the girls of Rome are known to have taken up tourists' ways . . ."

Not even the prostitutes ventured forth. Instead they hung over the iron railings of the *bordello* balcony to watch the male rites below. In their bright chenille robes they looked like pink flamingoes.

HERBERT KUBLY, *Stranger in Italy*

Aunti-Social?

Somehow, in a bistro, *or French eatery,*
Everyone suddenly discovers they can talk like
Sacha Guitry,
But they really can't,
And if I were the bartender I should poke them in the
œil *with the* plume de ma tante.

OGDEN NASH, *How do you say ha-ha in French?*

Light Baggage

Ras Hailu kept 80 female favourites busy—Nubians, women from India and from the Near East, and a few from Paris. Each of these beauties had 10 servants, but they themselves were under the unwelcome surveillance of the princess. They were regularly fattened, according to the Abyssinian ideal of beauty. To bring their weight up to at least sixteen stone as soon as possible, they avoided all exercise.

They would lie in bed all day and be turned over by their servants when they wanted to change their positions. These favourites could not, of course, be taken along by the Ras on his travels, for they were incapable of mounting a horse or mule. For his travels, the Ras kept an extra dozen of slender women—to have at least one travelling woman is customary amongst the Abyssinian grandees . . .

PAUL HARTLMAIER, *Golden Lion*

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Good Form

Flosshilde, the reception clerk, sat at her desk all day long watching the business men. She had red hair and was fat for her age and she wore an engagement ring made of large imitation diamonds. She spoke a dozen words of all languages and usually but not often, when the business men were very tiresome, she lost her head and the manager had to be sent for. Now she stood over Lushington while he filled up forms. "See!" she said, "You have not written. The profession of mother's father?"

"I don't know it."

"*So?*"

"No."

"Write *private* then. And the date of marriage of father and mother?"

"I can't remember."

"They are truly married?"

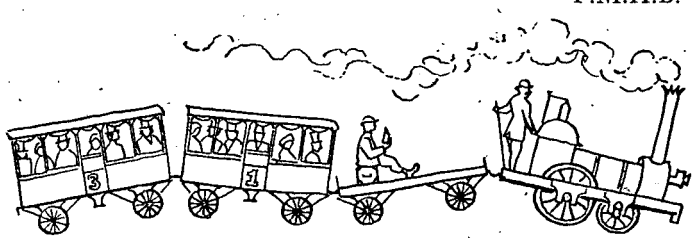
"They always say so." This was a critical situation. Flosshilde thought. She said: "Write any time before your birthday. But write it a year before."

ANTHONY POWELL, *Venusberg*

Holiday Spirit

If I had time to love you as I would,
Could we bring back the hour,
From Alps to Pyrenees we'd prove
The glory in the flower.
If you had time to love me as you did
When we were young, alas!
On Jura's sunny slopes we'd seek
The splendour in the grass.
But as things are, my love, if we can find
A sitter-in till dark,
Shall we with philosophic mind
Walk in St. James's Park?

F.M.H.B.



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TALK OF THE DEVIL

Something so unexpected as this was uncanny—frightening

BY VERNON BARTLETT

ONE needed no Ancient Greek soothsayers studying the entrails of chickens to conclude that the omens were unfavourable to that flight from Bukit Benta to Kota Bahru, for everybody for miles around knew of the feud between Ernest Hudson—Father Ernest Hudson, S.J.—and Coleton—Robert Coleton, Assistant Superintendent of Police.

The row at the Club had been only the climax to a long series of incidents dating from the first week after Father Hudson's arrival in the district, and these two men had come to personify the two attitudes of the white men in Malaya, and in every other dependent territory as well.

"The only thing the bastards understand is a kick up the backside," was Coleton's opinion of the best way in which to treat people whose skin differed in colour from his own.

"Unless you win their trust and affection," ran Father Hudson's belief, "you are denying Christianity."

"Sentimental bloody nonsense," was Coleton's reply, but the fact remained that the Malays had developed an extraordinary respect and devotion for Hudson, this follower of Jesus whom they, as Moslems, revered as one of their own prophets.

The row at the Club had been much more serious than this kind of exchange of views. Coleton had had trouble one evening with a police constable who had excused his alleged insubordination by quoting something he had heard Father Hudson say about the equality of all men before God. It happened also to be the evening when members from outlying rubber estates came into town, and Coleton had been drinking very heavily in the bar. As soon as Father Hudson came up the Club steps on one of his very rare visits—this was his opportunity to meet a few members of his scattered congregation—the policeman strode out onto the verandah to meet him. And there, in front of a dozen members making the most of the relative cool of the evening, he accused the priest of spreading dangerous doctrines among the Malays.

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" If I had my way," he said in his high falsetto voice, " I'd run all you crazy fellows out of the country. You and your Christianity! Talking a lot of namby-pamby twaddle to a lot of gaping natives! "

Namby-pamby was not a word one would normally use in connection with Ernest Hudson. It suggests somebody rather podgy and effeminate; he was gaunt and austere. Coleton himself, despite his great physical strength, might more appropriately have deserved the adjective, for the muscles covering his huge frame were beginning to turn to fat, and the voice that came out of him was so unexpectedly weak and high-pitched that the effect of it was uncanny, almost frightening.

And there was nothing namby-pamby about Father Hudson's reply to Coleton's attack.

Looking much as Savonarola must have looked when he was preaching against the luxury and corruption of the Church, he turned on his accuser.

" Stop that at once," he commanded. Then he continued in a quieter voice, " You are in need of our prayers. You have a devil in you. I will pray for you."

Onlookers admitted that the words were spoken with a certain arrogance, almost as though Hudson were in direct communication with God. But the extent to which they infuriated Coleton was startling.

" You pious bastard," he screamed. " I'll curse you every day of my life. What's more," he added, as other members hustled him towards the billiard-room, " I'll haunt you when I'm dead. To hell with you and your prayers! "

Everybody—and especially his fellow police officers—knew that Coleton was a brute and a bully. He had won so bad a reputation in the Palestine Police that he would probably have been dismissed from that force had the Mandate not come so suddenly to an end. In normal times, perhaps, he would not have been accepted in Malaya, but the country was facing an Emergency in which a few thousand bandits, with the invaluable help of the jungle that covers four-fifths of the country, had for years defied a considerable British army and a large Malayan police force.

It was no place and no time for half measures, and Coleton had no humanitarian scruples to make him hesitate, perhaps fatally, before taking drastic action. He was all for punishing even the weakest and the feeblest members of a community if it failed to provide information about the bandits' supply lines. He was quicker on the trigger than most of his enemies, and was much more accurate in his aim. The Malays under his command hated

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him for his brutality and feared him for his contempt for their superstitions.

The Europeans disliked him, but they had a grudging respect for his ruthlessness. They understood him, for they had met bullies of Coleton's type at school; Hudson, to most of them, was *incomprehensible*.

They admired the priest for the part he had played in the jungle during the Japanese Occupation of Malaya. But they had not experienced his loneliness, his fears, his sufferings during the time before Force 136 had provided a link between these jungle-dwellers and the outside world. They could not, therefore, understand why he had gone home after the war to become a priest, nor why he had returned to Malaya to advocate real racial equality such as most of the Europeans still hesitated to accept.

His austerity was out of place in a community of planters who sought relief from their own loneliness by behaving with the irresponsibility of schoolboys on their rare visits to the Club. His immense influence over Malays, Chinese, and even the aborigines left his fellow Europeans puzzled and disquieted.

There were, of course, exceptions, and one of them was Gaynor, the District Officer. He was a good-looking young bachelor who had picked up a D.F.C. and Bar during the war and who wanted, after it was over, to do something more useful and enterprising than to sit in an office chair. The devotion felt for him by the men in his squadron had shown that he was a born leader; as D.O. in Bukit Benta, the same qualities were producing a similar result.

There were men down in Kuala Lumpur who were angered by his disrespect for official " bumph "—a disrespect which would undoubtedly slow down his promotion. But Adrian Gaynor couldn't care less; he wanted nothing better than to go on doing his D.O. job efficiently and inconspicuously.

And Father Hudson had given him a new and more satisfying conception of his job. His responsibility was not merely to keep order and to assure honest administration; it was to guide, to educate, as well. He certainly would never have put it in these words, but he governed by love, just as surely as Coleton governed by fear. He had felt embarrassed by Father Hudson's attempts to turn him into a fervent and practising Christian, but he had gained far more from his long arguments with the priest than either of them knew. That, no doubt, explained Gaynor's intense admiration for Hudson, his senior by barely three years but his superior by an immense amount of study and reflection.

And since chance had brought these three men to the same aircraft which was to fly them from Bukit Benta to Kota Bahru,

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one needed no soothsayers to conclude that the omens were unfavourable. Ransom, the pilot, put it in his own words: "Rather be carrying a blasted menagerie," he said as he climbed into the cockpit.

Those words, by the way, were the last he ever uttered, unless he prayed or cursed during those fleeting seconds when the aircraft went suddenly and entirely out of control and crashed into the jungle on the mountainside.

The aircraft had not caught fire, but there was little else to provide consolation. Ransom must have been killed at once, for the machine had crashed head-on against a rock. Hudson, who had been in the front passenger seat, was unconscious when the others, escaping with no more than bruises and superficial cuts, had dragged him out of the wreckage.

Coleton had a hip-flask full of brandy, Gaynor had a small packet of sandwiches; two of the four Malay policemen, who had been the only other passengers, had little bags of rice. And that was about all.

For the first hour they had little leisure in which to consider their situation. Coleton and three of the policemen were searching the wreckage for articles that might be useful. The fourth policeman was digging Ransom's grave. Gaynor was trying to patch up Hudson's wounds from a first-aid kit.

There was a grim-looking gash along one side of his head. His right leg had obviously been broken just above the knee. And there was a queer discoloration down his right side, almost from his armpit to his thigh, which suggested some internal injuries far beyond Gaynor's power of diagnosis. He was terribly pale and his cheeks were sunken, so that he looked almost like a corpse. He reminded Gaynor of some Italian Primitive painting of Christ on the Cross.

They buried Ransom with nothing more than the Lord's Prayer to commend him to his Maker. Then Coleton came over to where Hudson was lying, and looked down at him. "Well, *he* won't last long," he commented. "We'd better decide what we are going to do."

"There'll be aircraft out looking for us," suggested Gaynor. "Surely the first thing to do is to light a fire. The largest we can."

"And advertise our presence to the bandits? Not on your life. Li Cheng-Wong's boys are somewhere about here, and if they find us, our number's up. Besides," Coleton went on, "you know as well as I do how small the chances are of rescue. Remember that machine that crashed near Rawang during an air-strike,

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with half a dozen staff wallahs looking on and pinpointing the spot? It wasn't found for two years, and then only by chance. No, don't kid yourself. We've only ourselves to depend upon, and the sooner we get moving the better."

"I don't know if Hudson's fit to move," said Gaynor.

"No, I agree. The only thing to do is to leave him. The poor devil won't live in any case. They all look like that when they're about to kick the bucket. Besides, it would slow us down intolerably to carry a stretcher through this stuff. You don't know the jungle as I do. This deep jungle isn't too bad, but once we get into the secondary stuff, we'll be lucky if we advance a hundred yards an hour. If any of us are going to get out, we've got to leave him behind."

Gaynor jumped angrily to his feet.

"You can't possibly do that," he protested. "I've never heard such a suggestion."

"We can't afford to be sentimental when our own lives are at stake. Look here, Gaynor, don't be an ass. We've *got* to leave him."

The Malay policemen, huddled in a little group, listened in anxious bewilderment to the argument. Only the corporal, Abdullah bin Ahmed, knew enough English to understand what it was about.

He came forward diffidently. "We can make a stretcher," he said in Malay. "We will carry the Tuan."

Without waiting for orders, one of the constables, Ya'acob bin Salleh, whose insubordination had been the indirect cause of the row at the Club, cut down some saplings with his parang, and in a few minutes he and his fellows had made a serviceable stretcher tied together by rattan. Coleton looked on in sulky and unusual silence as they lifted the injured priest onto it. Then, preceded by two constables cutting back the undergrowth, he started off down the mountainside.

Ransom, the only man who would have known their whereabouts, was dead. The Malayan jungle is so dense and so widespread that the observer from the air can often see no sign of human existence—no road, no railway, no clearing, no smoke. But if they followed a rivulet until it became a stream and the stream until it became a river they might come across some Malay kampong.

Progress was terribly slow, for they soon found themselves in belukar—secondary jungle where many of the trees have at some time been felled and have given a chance to the thickest and most savage undergrowth in the world.

It was made much slower by the necessity of cutting a path

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wide enough for the stretcher, and Coleton's temper grew worse and worse at each check.

Gaynor had given Hudson an injection of morphia, but it was not enough to kill the pain. The sick man babbled incessantly, but Gaynor, walking behind the stretcher, could make little sense of what he said.

At one time, he must have thought he was back in the jungle during the Japanese Occupation—there was something about Force 136 and a parachute drop that had gone wrong; the ammunition he needed so desperately had fallen into enemy hands, and he broke into sobs of disappointment. At another time, he seemed to be arguing with somebody about the importance of belief that transcended all reason. There was a lot Gaynor could not fully understand about the rationalists. At one time, in his deep but quavering voice, he began to recite Ave Marias.

"Can't you keep that damned fool quiet?" asked Coleton in his high, petulant voice. "And you"—he addressed the policemen who were carrying the stretcher—"why the hell don't you move faster?"

By the time the aquarium-green of the jungle had turned to sudden darkness and the cicadas were making shrill noises like so many machines in a great factory, the party was no more than a mile from the crashed machine. There was, of course, no trail to follow, and they had to wind their way between huge, moss-covered rocks.

Once, when the stretcher was being lifted across a great fallen tree, a branch gave way, and Hudson was dropped into a nest of large red ants. The insects swarmed over the congealed black blood on his face and leg. When at last the party found a small open space where Coleton decided they had best spend the night, Gaynor needed a full fifteen minutes to burn the leeches off his injured friend with the end of his cigarette.

The night was abominable. Their last meal had been breakfast, and Gaynor's sandwiches worked out at one each, excluding Hudson, who was obviously too ill to eat.

The evening thunderstorm seeped through the great canopy of forest trees and dripped on them, and a cold, penetrating mist replaced the steamy heat of the day. They collected rain-water in a cigarette-tin, and Daud bin Mohammed, one of the constables, managed to cook a little rice in it, some of which Hudson was able to swallow.

He hovered between lucidity and delirium. While the others shivered with cold, he shivered with fever, and Adrian Gaynor was continually mopping the sweat off his forehead.

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And, now that they had time in which to consider their situation, the quarrel between Gaynor and Coleton began again. Coleton argued that men of the S.A.S. Regiment who could not keep up with their party were always left behind with a compass, food, and water. It would be folly to try to take Hudson any farther. Gaynor reminded him that Hudson was very badly injured, and could not possibly move if left to himself.

Hudson, who had appeared to be unconscious, intervened to support Coleton's claim—the others must certainly leave him, he insisted, since that was their only possibility of escape.

And the more Hudson's tired, deep voice mingled with Coleton's squeaky urgings, the more determined Gaynor became not to leave him.

Probably the hopelessness of their plight, added to the pain each of them was enduring—and, in the case of Coleton, to the amount of brandy he had drunk—made them slightly hysterical and overwrought. Nothing else could explain the scene that followed Ya'acob bin Salleh's accident with the brandy-flask.

Coleton had already been angered by the careful attention his own policemen paid to a man whom he hated, and when Ya'acob, hurrying to the priest with a cupful of water, knocked over the brandy-flask, the immense Englishman jumped to his feet and towered over the Malay. "You little brown bastard!" he squeaked, and he shook him by the shoulders until the constable hung limply from his great fists.

"Stop that at once!" The voice was deep and strong, although it came from the injured man.

He had managed somehow to raise himself on his left elbow, and his eyes blazed with anger. "You shall not treat one of God's creatures like that!"

"Shall I not, indeed? And who's to stop me?" sneered Coleton, and very deliberately he gave the Malay a tremendous kick as he turned to run away.

"You evil man! God's punishment will be upon you." But even as Hudson spoke, he choked and blood poured out of his mouth. Gaynor, who had also risen to his feet, rushed forward to his friend, who fell back unconscious on his stretcher. The Malay policemen crouched miserably in the remotest part of the tiny clearing.

All through that hateful night Hudson flung himself from side to side in fever, and Gaynor sat by his side, putting damp handkerchiefs on his forehead. Despite his experiences during the war, he had remained unusually young and naïve for his age, and his affection for Hudson was all the greater now that the man to whom he had looked for leadership lay so helpless and so near to death.

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He was humiliated by his inability to save this friend who had so influenced his own life.

Common sense conflicted with his loyalty. If the party was to be saved, its mobility must be increased; its mobility could be increased only if Hudson were left behind. Should he, Gaynor, make the sacrifice by proxy, by leaving a man he so dearly loved? Or was not the obvious thing for him to do to remain with his friend while the others went on? Yes, he decided, that was the solution.

The only possible solution.

Throughout most of the night, Hudson talked and babbled. Sometimes he spoke in his normal bass voice, apologizing to Gaynor and the others for so adding to their problems, and arguing that he must be left to die alone. At others, he prayed almost in a whisper—prayed for more charity in his dealings with Coleton, prayed for Coleton himself.

"Leave me out of it," shrilled Coleton in a voice that for the first time betrayed fear. "Leave me out of your confounded prayers. If you don't, I'll bloody well make you, crock though you are."

But he did nothing when Hudson went on with his appeals to the Almighty to be merciful to them in life and death. "I have been guilty of pride, oh Lord, in that I have condemned your son, Robert Coleton. Make me humble, oh Lord! Be merciful unto us, miserable sinners."

"Oh, shut up," screamed Coleton, putting his hands over his ears to deaden the sound of that hated voice.

At other times Gaynor could not tell whether Hudson was delirious or in control of his mind. He was in this uncertainty when Hudson, after a long silence, began to talk in an undertone, as though he were arguing with himself.

"But the man's evil, definitely evil," he said. "He corrupts those with whom he comes in contact. He controls men by fear, and not by love. Christ never compromised with evil. Would He have shown patience with such a blasphemer and bully? with a man possessed of a devil? The man has no right to live. The world should be purged of such men."

After a pause, he repeated those last words: "The world should be purged of such men."

Coleton did not hear. He had fallen asleep, with the empty brandy-flask as his pillow.

The Malays, less frightened even of their own situation than of the Tuan's struggle with death, huddled in a remote and silent group.

But Gaynor heard. Heard and pondered.

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Before daylight, Coleton roused Gaynor, who was dozing, crouched by the stretcher. "We've got to get things clear," he said. "It's just too bad about this man"—he indicated Hudson with a jerk of his head—"but there's nothing we can do about him. We'll get nowhere if we try to lug him along; without him, we might get clear of this blasted jungle. We might even send a search-party to bring him in. It's common sense, and I hope you've come to your senses."

"I've made up my mind. I'm going to stay with him."

Coleton's voice rose to a high, petulant little squeak, as it did when he was becoming really angry.

"You bloody young fool!" he exclaimed. "This isn't the time for that old-school-tie nonsense. This is serious. I know this bloody jungle. We'll be very lucky if any of us get out of it alive. Our chances will be much greater if we stick together, and Hudson's going to die anyhow.

"The only thing to do is to leave him; he begged us to do so himself." He paused a moment and then added, with a suspicion of a malicious smile, "There's only one compass between us, and I've got it."

"I know all that," Gaynor agreed, "but I can't leave him. I'm going to stay."

"Damn you for a stupid young fool! I can't *make* you come. Without a compass you'll be going round and round in circles in no time at all. You can't keep a sense of direction in this damned jungle."

He saw that Gaynor was not to be persuaded. He called to the Malay corporal and told him to get ready. Daud and Ya'acob were to go ahead with their parangs. The other two policemen would bring up the rear with such kit as they possessed.

"And Tuan Gaynor?" asked the Corporal.

"He has decided to stay here."

Corporal Abdullah began a discussion with his fellow Malays. Clearly Ya'acob was in a mutinous state of mind. "Hurry up," said Coleton. "This is an order."

"We will not go without the Tuan," declared Ya'acob, and even the Corporal nodded his head in agreement.

Coleton's voice rose to a thin scream of rage. But his chances would dwindle to nothing if he were to go off alone. The Malays knew far more of the jungle than he did and they could cut their way through any belukar far more quickly than he could. He had no choice but to give in.

"We'll try one more day," he agreed, "and it will serve you all right if you starve."

The mountains at the spine of Malaya rise to some seven

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thousand feet, but even at their summits the jungle still hides the sky. Twice during the day they heard aircraft, and once a helicopter must have skimmed a bare fifty feet above the tops of the monster trees.

They cursed themselves for not having made a yet more thorough search of the smashed cockpit, in which they might have found flares for use in such an emergency as theirs.

At midday they halted for an hour, and Coleton's anxiety about bandits was less than his desire to attract the attention of possible rescuers; they lit a bonfire and piled damp branches on it to make as much smoke as possible. But the smoke hung about under the branches a hundred and fifty feet above them. To add to their worries, the afternoon thunderstorm came on much earlier than usual, and with such severity that no aircraft could have continued the search.

Coleton's fury grew with each passing hour. He was not a man lacking in physical courage, but the thought that his chances of survival were diminished by the presence of this dying man he so hated robbed him of all self-control.

He cursed the Malay policemen until they muttered angrily under their breath. He treated Gaynor as though he were an insolent schoolboy. Once, when he was taking a turn at carrying one end of the stretcher, he seemed to stumble, and the stretcher, with Hudson strapped to it by rattan cords, fell into a cleft between two rocks.

Gaynor was convinced that Coleton had stumbled on purpose, and said so.

"You lousy little swine," squeaked Coleton. "You'll be sorry for that."

Misfortune, which so often brings out the best qualities in men, in this case brought out the worst. Hatred between Coleton and Gaynor rose until it seemed to overshadow even Coleton's hatred for the priest. The Malays, so willing to be cheerful but so responsive to the moods of their Europeans, went about their tasks in the deepest melancholy.

Father Hudson, mumbling prayers to himself, now delirious, now sane, seemed hardly to retain an interest in this world. His tortured and injured body was jolted to and fro on the stretcher; his spirit was elsewhere.

The climax came when they camped for the night. The Malays had gone off a few yards into the jungle to cut wood for a fire. Gaynor had been trying to make Hudson a little more comfortable. When he got stiffly to his feet he noticed that Coleton, on the outskirts of their camp, was hurriedly putting something into his pocket. He pretended to take no notice, but nevertheless

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kept an eye on him. After a few moments there was no doubt possible; Coleton had hidden some food and was eating it on the quiet.

Challenged, he admitted that he had his emergency police ration. "It's only meant for one man," he said, "and I don't propose to commit suicide for the sake of that mad priest."

"You're a low-down swine, and you know it."

"Nobody's going to talk to me like that. Least of all a smarmy little puppy like you. You and your priest! Why should I share anything with you? I loathe the pair of you."

Before he could finish, Gaynor rushed at him. Coleton, trying to step backwards, stumbled over a root, and fell heavily to the ground. In an instant, Gaynor's hands were round his throat. Possibly Coleton had been slightly stunned by the fall; although much the more powerful of the two, he put up a surprisingly poor resistance. Gaynor's hands tightened, and he remembered Father Hudson's words: *The world should be purged of such men.* Had the priest been sane or delirious? Was it not right to kill Coleton?

Gaynor hardly knew what he was doing, but when he rose to his feet, Coleton was dead.

He had no time to think about what he had done, for he heard Ya'acob cry out beside the stretcher, "The Tuan! The Tuan is dead!" Gaynor ran across. His friend lay there with his mouth open and his body rigid and still. Gaynor sank on his knees, buried his face in his hands, and wept.

How long he was there he did not know. He suddenly became aware that Corporal Abdullah was looking down at them both with an expression of amazement on his face. "The Tuan is alive," he said. "His fever has stopped." And at once Gaynor became light-headed with relief.

It was true—Hudson was not dead. His fever seemed suddenly to have left him, and he was sleeping peacefully. He had been so near death for the last thirty-six hours and had been so shaken and racked by fever that Ya'acob must have mistaken the stillness of sleep for that of death.

For a while Gaynor sat by the side of his friend, too relieved by this discovery to worry about Coleton, still lying out there beyond the firelight, or about his own small chance of escape. Then he, too, lay down on the ground and slept.

It was very dark when he awoke. By the flickering light of the fire he could see that Hudson had just woken up.

"Is there anything I can get you? How are you feeling?" he asked the sick man.

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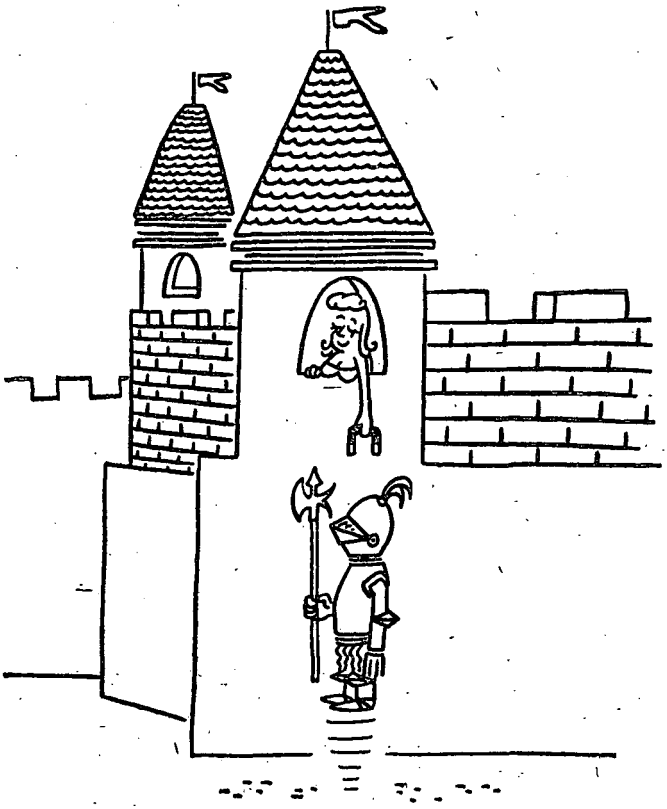
" I'm much better. I shall be all right after all," answered Hudson, but Gaynor screamed with terror. For the voice that came from Hudson's body had changed.

Unmistakably, it was the shrill, squeaky voice of Robert Coleton.

Vernon Bartlett is a well-known broadcaster and specialist in foreign affairs. At the age of twenty he was commanding a company in World War I. He has worked on many different daily papers, for a while was special Times correspondent in Europe, founded and edited " World Review." He has written a novel, " Calf Love," an entertaining autobiography, " This Is My Life," and he collaborated with R. C. Sherriff in turning the latter's famous play " Journey's End " into a novel.



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PROMISE AT DUSK

Framed in the misty doorway
was the ghost

BY WALTER DE LA MARE

A DOCTOR hears many strange stories, which must for ever remain a secret confidence between himself and his patients. But the story that my old friend, whom we will call Purcell, told me cannot, I think, be so considered. We were sitting one evening in his long garden, just after the fall of dusk, smoking together. His wife had been dangerously (but quite triumphantly) ill; and this was a few evenings afterwards.

"You know, of course," he said half apologetically, "that she has always been very nervous and high-strung; at least—" He broke off and puffed softly on, narrowing his eyes, his hands resting one over the other on his knee. A robin was chattering in the lilac bushes. "I don't think I ever told you how we actually met. There's no harm in telling . . . Is there?"

"Well, that's best answered when I've heard," I replied. And we laughed.

Well, you remember—oh, years ago—when I used to live with my mother at Witchelham? It was an absurdly long journey from town. But she liked the country; and so, nearly two hours every day of my life, except Saturdays and Sundays, were spent in rumbling up and down on that antediluvian branch line.

I believe they bought their carriages second-hand. We had an amazing collection of antiques. The stations, too, were that kind of stranded Noah's ark in a garden, which make it rather jolly to look out of the window in the summer, with their banks of flowers, and martins in the eaves. A kind of romance hung over the very engines. You felt in some of the carriages like a savant confronted with a papyrus he can't read. It was all very vague, of course. But there it was.

One evening, a Tuesday in December, I left my office rather later than usual. There had been a lofty fog most of the day; all the lights flared yellow and amber, and the traffic was muffled to

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a woolly roar. The station was nearly empty. An early train, the 5.3, coming in late, had carried off most of the usual passengers, and only just we few long-distance ones were left.

I walked slowly along the platform, past the silent, illuminated carriages, and got into No. 3399—a "Second." The number, of course, I noticed afterwards. It was cushioned in deep crimson, lit unusually clearly with oil; half a window-strap was gone, and the strings of the luggage bracket hung down in one corner—like a cockatrice's tent. It was haunted, too, by the very faintest of fragrances, as if it had stood all the summer with windows wide open in a rose garden.

I sat down in the right-hand corner facing the engine, and began to read. Footsteps passed now and again; fog signals detonated out of space; a whistle sounded, and then, rather like an indolent and timid centipede, we crept out of the station. I read on until I presently found that I hadn't for quite some little while been following the sense of what I was reading. Back I went a page or two, and failed again.

Then I put the book down, and found myself in this rather clearly lit old crimson carriage alone—quite curiously alone. You know what I mean; just as one is alone in a ballroom when the guests have said good-bye after a dance; just as one's alone after a funeral. It pressed on me. I was rather tired, and perhaps a little run down, so that I keenly welcomed all such vague psychological nuances. The carriage was vacant then—richly, delicately, absorbingly vacant.

Who had gone out? I know this sounds like utter nonsense. I assure you, though, it was just as it affected me then. There was first this very faint suggestion of flowers in this almost sinister amber lamplight; that was nothing in itself; but there was also an undefined presence of someone, a personality of someone here, too, as obviously reminiscent of a reality as the perfume was reminiscent of once-real flowers.

The 5.29 did not stop near town, loitered straight on to Thornwood, missed Upland Bois, and launched itself into Witchelham. All that interminable journey—for the fog had fallen low with nightfall—I sat and brooded on this curious impression, on all such impressions, however faint and illusory. So deep did I fall into reverie that when I came to myself and looked up, I was first conscious that the train was at a standstill, and next that I was no longer alone. In the farther and opposite corner of the carriage a lady was sitting. The air between us was the least bit dimmed with fog. But I saw her, none the less, quite clearly—a lady in deep black.

Her right hand was gloveless and lay in her lap. On her left

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hand her chin was resting, so that the face was turned away from me towards the black glass of the window. Whether it was her deep mourning, her utter stillness, something in her attitude, I cannot say. I only know that I had never seen such tragic and complete dejection in any human creature before. And yet something was wanting, something was absent. How can I describe it? I can only say it was as if I was dreaming her there. She was absolutely real to my mind, to myself; and yet I knew, by some extraordinary inward instinct, that if I did but turn my head, withdraw my eyes, she would be gone.

I watched her without stirring, simply watched her, overwhelmed with interest and pity, and a kind of faint anxiety or apprehension. And suddenly, I cannot more exactly express it, I became conscious that my eyes were out of focus, that they were fixed with extreme attention on—nothing at all.

I cannot say I was alarmed, nor even astonished. It was rather vexation, disappointment. But as I looked, glancing about me, I became conscious of a small, oblong, brown-paper package, lying partly hidden under the arm-rest of the seat only just now so mysteriously occupied, and as mysteriously vacated.

Directly I became aware of it, it seemed, of course, extraordinarily conspicuous. Could I by the faintest chance in the world have overlooked it on first entering the carriage? I see now that it must have been so. But at the time I was convinced it was impossible.

I took up the package, felt it, shook it, and then, without the least excuse or compunction in the world, untied the string and opened the plain wooden case within. It contained a small six-chambered revolver. It was inlaid with mother of pearl—a beautiful, deadly little weapon. I scrutinized it for a moment almost in confusion, then I flung down the carriage window, just in time to see the face of the station-master momentarily illumined in the fog as we crept out of Thornwood. I hastily shut the box and packed it, paper and all, into my pocket.

It was entirely intuitive, simply the irresistible caprice of the moment, but I felt I could not surrender it; I felt certain that I should sooner or later meet with its owner. I would surrender it then.

The next day seemed interminable. Fog still hung over the city. I longed to get back to my haunted carriage. I felt vaguely expectant, as if some very distant, scarcely audible voice were calling to me, questioningly, appealingly. I was convinced that my ghost was really a ghost, a phantasm, an apparition—not an hallucination. Surely an event so rare and inexplicable must have a sequel.

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Out into the misty street (which, in the mist, indeed seemed thronged with phantoms) I turned once more that evening with an excitement I cannot describe—such an excitement as one feels when one is about to meet again a long-absent, a very close and intimate friend.

Again the 5.3 had befriended me. The platform was nearly empty when the 5.29 backed slowly into the station. I had expected no obstacle, had encountered none. Here was my 3399, its lamp, perhaps, not quite so lustrous, its crimson a little dimmed.

I entered and sat down in my corner, like a spider in its newly spun web. What prompted such certainty, such conviction, I cannot conceive. The few minutes passed, passengers walked deliberately by. Some glanced in; one old lady, with a reticule and gold spectacles, peered hesitatingly, peered again, all but entered, and, as if suddenly alarmed, hastily withdrew. We were already late.

And then, just at the last moment, as the doors were beginning to slam, I heard with extraordinary distinctness what it seemed I had for long been waiting for—a light and hurried footfall. It paused, came nearer, paused again, and then (although I simply could not turn my head to look) I knew that there, looking in on me, searchingly, anxiously, stood framed in the misty doorway—my ghost.

Still she hesitated. But it was too late to retreat. She entered, for I heard the rustling of her gown. And then, at once, the train began to move. At last, when we were really rumbling on, I managed to turn my head. There she sat, completely in black, her left hand in her lap, her chin lightly resting on the other, her eyes gazing gravely and reflectively, yet with a curious fixity, out of the window. She did not stir. So slim, so unreal, she looked in her dead black, it seemed almost that this might be illusion, too—this, too, an apparition. *Almost*, but how surely, how convincingly, not quite.

It sounds absurd, but so absorbed again I grew in watching her, so lost in thought, I think I sighed. Whether or not, she suddenly turned her head and looked at me with startled eyes and parted lips. And, I think, the faintest red rose in her cheeks.

I leaned forward. "You won't please misunderstand me—my speaking, I mean. I think, perhaps, if I might explain . . . you would forgive me . . ." I blundered on.

She raised her eyebrows, faintly and distantly smiling. But I felt vaguely certain that somehow she had foreseen my being there. "I don't quite see why one should *have* to explain," she said indifferently. "You could not ask me to forgive anything

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that would need forgiveness. But tonight, you must please excuse me. I am so very tired I don't really think I could listen. I know I couldn't answer."

"It's only this, just this," I replied in confusion. "Something has happened: I can't explain now; only if I should seem inexcusably inquisitive—horribly so, perhaps—you will understand when I do explain . . . You need but answer yes or no to three brief questions—I cannot tell you how deeply interested I am in their answers. May I?"

She frowned a little, and turned again to the window. "What is the first question?" she asked coldly.

"The first is—please don't suppose that I do not already know the answer, instinctively, as it were, en rapport—have you ever travelled in this carriage before, No. 3399?"

Could you imagine a more inane way of putting it? I knew that she had, with absolute certainty. But, none the less, she feigned to be unsure. Her eyes scrutinized every corner, but indifferently, and finally settled on the broken netting. "Yes," she said simply. "But as for the number—I don't think I knew railway carriages *were* numbered." She turned her eyes again directly on mine.

"Were you alone?" I said, and held my breath.

She frowned. "I don't see—" she began. "But, yes," she broke off obstinately. "It was the night before last. I was alone."

I turned for a moment to the window. "The last question," I went on slowly, "could only possibly be forgiven to one who was a very real, or hoped to be a very real, faithful friend." We looked gently and calmly, and just in that curious instantaneous way, immortally as it were, into each other's eyes.

"Well?" she said.

"You were in extreme trouble?"

She did not at once reply. Her beautiful face grew not paler, more shadowy. She leaned one narrow hand on the crimson seat, and still looked with utterly frank, terribly miserable, desolate eyes into mine. "I think—I had got beyond," she said.

What sane thing could I offer for a confidence so generous and so childlike? "Well," I said, "it's the same world for all."

She shook her head, and smiled. "I remember one quite, quite different. But still," she continued gravely, as if speaking to herself, and still leaning on her hand, "it is nearly over now. And I can take an interest, a real interest, in what you might tell me; I mean, as to how you came to know, and why you ask."

I told her simply of my dream, the hallucination, psychic experience, or whatever you may care to call it.

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"Yes," she said, "I *did* sit here. It is very, very strange. It . . ." and then she stopped as if waiting, as if fearing to go on.

I said nothing for a moment, knowing not what to say. At last I took out the little wooden case just as it was. "I cannot ask forgiveness *now*," I said, "but this—is it yours?"

She nodded with a slight shudder. Every trace of colour left her face.

"You left it in the train on Monday?"

She nodded.

"And today"—it was a wild, improbable guess—"today you came to town to look for it, to inquire about it?"

She did not answer, merely sat transfixed, with hard, unmoving eyes and trembling lip.

"I can't help what you may think, how you may resent my asking. I can't shirk responsibility. I know this is not an accident. I cannot believe it was an accident which sent me here last night. I cannot believe God ever meant any trouble, any grief, to have *this* for an end. If I give it you, will you promise me something?"

She did not answer.

"You must promise me," I said.

"*What* am I to promise you?" she said, her eyes burning in her still, white, furious face.

"Need I say?"

She leaned her elbows on her knees, did not look at me again, merely talked, talked on, as if to her reflection, in that dim crimson, fronting her eyes.

"It is just as it happens, I suppose," she said. "It's just this miserable thing we call life, all the world over. You hadn't the ghost of a right to open it—not the faintest right in the world. It is all sheer inference, that is all. As for believing, there's not the faintest proof—not the faintest. Who *can* care *now*? But, no; somehow you got to know, without the least mercy or compunction. Who would believe you? It is simply a blind, pitiless ruse, I suppose . . . And so . . . you have compelled me, forced me to confess, to explain what no one on earth dreams of, or suspects—you, a complete stranger. Isn't my life my own, then? Oh yes, I know all that. I know all that . . . I refuse. You will understand, please, I will *not* promise.

"Who," she cried, flinging scoffingly back her head, "who gave *you* my life? Who gave *you* the right to question, to persecute me?" And then, suddenly, she hid her face in her hands. "What am I saying, what am I saying?" she almost whispered. "I don't know what I am saying."

"Please, please," I said, "don't think of me. It doesn't in the

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least matter what you think, or say, of me. Listen, only listen; you must, you *must* promise."

"I can't, I can't!" she cried, rising to her feet and facing me once more. The train was slowing down. Here, then, was her station. Was I, after all, to be too late? I, too, stood up.

"Think what you will of me," I said, "I am only, only your friend, now and always. I do believe that I was sent here. I don't understand why, or how: but I cannot, cannot, I mustn't leave you, until you promise."

Something seemed to stoop, to look out of her eyes into mine. How can I possibly put the thought into words?—a fear, a haunting, terrible sorrow and despair, simply, I suppose, her soul's, her spirit's last glance of utter weariness, utter hopelessness; a challenge, a defiance. I know not what I prayed, or to whom, but pray I did, gazing blindly into her face. And then it faded, fainted, died away, that awful presence in those dark beautiful eyes.

She put out her hand with a sob, like a tired-out, beaten child. "I promise," she said . . .

My friend stopped speaking. Night had fallen deep around us. The garden lay silent, tree and flower obscure and still, beneath the feebly shining stars. We turned towards the house. A white blind in an upper window glimmered faintly in the darkness. And we heard a tiny, impatient, angry, inarticulate voice, crying, crying.

"Well," I said, taking his arm, and waving my hand, with my best professional smile, towards the window, "she has kept her promise, hasn't she?"

★ ★ ★

HARD BITTEN

After dinner there was dummy whist with the Lady-in-Waiting. It is possible that the latter, Miss Caroline Dawson, had other views about the bliss of life in a bothie. Mrs. Lindsay, writing with personal experience of "The Hut" at Alt-na-Guithasach, described her vivid recollections of the insect life. The trout and midges of Loch Muick were both, in her opinion, "superlative in their way." It was during an evening by the waters of Muick that one of the party described the origin of the Highland Fling as "a kilt and midges." To be Lady-in-Waiting in the early years of the Queen's Highland life meant a share, bravely borne, in the ardours and endurances of the Expeditions.

IVOR BROWN, *Balmoral: The History of a Home*

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Readers' Letters

OVERWHELMED at the number and quality of letters received in response to our call for candid comment, we are awarding prizes to five of our readers:—

Bon Voyage!

DEAR SIR,—It has never entered my head that I might be asked to give a *reason* for liking the Argosy. I always have liked it, I like it now, and while you continue to maintain the high standard of its contents, and its easy-to-handle make-up, I shall continue to like it. This is under ten lines, isn't it? *Bon voyage!*

E. M. RUSSELL

Don't Fool About

DEAR SIR,—Apropos to the first paragraph on page 4 of Argosy for May. Now leave the ruddy book as it is. I'm an Old Age Pensioner and it's just right for me—but publish twice a month if you will—and don't fool about with the price any more.

J. HOLT

Much-Travelled Copy

DEAR SIR,—It was with a sense of shock that I read the last sentence of the last paragraph in "Log Book" (May issue). I always thought that your magazine was for ME! I have never missed an issue for years now, I cannot count exactly but it must be 6 or 8 years. When I have finished, I pass my copy on to my husband, then it goes to my father in Canada. Both men grumble if a copy is late in reaching them . . .

Lanarca, Cyprus

VERONICA DODKINS

Widdershins

DEAR EDITOR,—Blistering comments! What's the matter with you, man—are you widdershins with yourself? Argosy is all that we would ask of you; from cover to cover it is starred faithfully every month with brilliant stories. Argosy is certainly the best that money can buy.

GEORGE UNDERHILL

The Ladies, God Bless 'Em

DEAR SIR,—Women and children last, indeed! It was the women who brought Argosy into our household and introduced it to the menfolk. Long may you live.

IRENE MASON

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Readers from all over the world are suggesting their favourite Argosy stories. This month's choice is a thrilling science fiction adventure by popular Argosy author and sf expert Ray Bradbury

SOUND OF THUNDER

BY RAY BRADBURY

THE sign on the office wall read:

TIME SAFARI, INC.
SAFARIS TO ANY YEAR IN THE PAST
YOU NAME THE ANIMAL
WE TAKE YOU THERE
YOU SHOOT IT

Mr. Eckels smiled nervously and handed a cheque for ten thousand dollars to the man behind the desk.

"Does this safari guarantee I come back alive?"

"We guarantee nothing," said the official, "except the dinosaurs."

He turned. "This is Mr. Travis, your Safari Guide in the Past. He'll tell you what and where to shoot. If he says no shooting, no shooting. If you don't follow directions, there's a stiff penalty of another ten thousand dollars, plus possible government action, on your return."

Eckels looked across the vast office at an arrangement of wires, golden boxes, and an aurora that flickered like a great bonfire.

"Hell and damn," Eckels breathed, the light of the Machine on his thin face.. "A real time machine."

He shook his head. "Makes you think. If the election had gone badly yesterday, I might be here now running away from the results. Thank God Keith won. He'll make a fine President of the United States."

"Yes," said the man behind the desk. "We're lucky. If Lyman had got in, we'd have had the worst kind of dictatorship. People called us up, you know, joking but not joking. Said if Lyman got elected they wanted to go and live in 1492. Of course it's not our business to conduct escapes, but to form safaris.

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Anyway, Keith's President now. All you've got to worry about is—"

"Shooting my dinosaur," Eckels said.

"A Tyrannosaurus rex. The damnedest monster in history. Sign this release. If anything happens to you, we're not responsible. Those dinosaurs are hungry."

Eckels flushed angrily. "Trying to scare me?"

"Frankly, yes. We don't want anyone going who'll panic at the first shot. Six safari leaders were killed last year, and a dozen hunters. We're here to give you the damnedest thrill a real hunter ever asked for. Taking you back sixty million years to bag the biggest damned game of all time. Your cheque's still there. Tear it up."

Mr. Eckels looked at the cheque for a long time. His fingers twitched. "Good luck," said the man behind the desk. "Mr. Travis, he's all yours."

They moved silently across the room, taking their guns with them, towards the Machine, towards the silver metal and the roaring light . . .

First a day and then a night and then a day and then a night, then it was day-night-day-night-day. A week, a month, a year, a decade! 2056 A.D., 2019 A.D., 1999! 1957! Gone!

They put on their oxygen helmets and tested the intercoms.

Eckels swayed on the padded seat, his face pale, his jaw stiff, his hands tight on the new rifle. There were four other men in the Machine: Travis, the safari leader; his assistant, Lesperance; and two other hunters, Billings and Kramer. They sat looking at one another, and the years blazed around them.

"Can these guns get a dinosaur cold?" Eckels felt his mouth saying.

"If you hit them right," Travis said on the helmet radio. "Some dinosaurs have the equivalent of two brains, one in the head, another—a nerve plexus—far down the spinal column. We stay away from those. Put your first two shots into the eyes, if you can—blind them and go back into the brain."

The Machine howled. Time was a film run backwards. Suns fled and ten million moons fled after them. "Good lord," said Eckels. "Every hunter that ever lived would envy us today. This makes Africa seem like Illinois."

The Machine slowed; its scream fell to a murmur. The Machine stopped. The sun stopped in the sky.

The fog that had enveloped the Machine blew away, and they were in an old time, a very old time indeed, three hunters and two safari heads with their blue metal guns across their knees.

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" Christ isn't born yet," said Travis. " Moses has not gone to the mountain to talk with God. The Pyramids are still in the earth, waiting to be cut out and put up. Remember that. Alexander, Caesar, Napoleon, Hitler—none of them exists." The men nodded. " That," Mr. Travis said, pointing, " is the jungle of sixty million two thousand and fifty-five years before President Keith." He indicated a metal path that wandered into green wilderness, over steaming swamp, among giant ferns and palms.

" And that," he said, " is the Path, laid by Time Safari for your use. It floats six inches above the earth. Doesn't touch so much as one grass blade, flower, or tree. It's an anti-gravity metal. Its purpose is to keep you from touching this world of the past in any way. Stay on the Path. Don't go off it. I repeat: *Don't go off.* For *any* reason! If you fall off, there's a penalty. And don't shoot any animal we don't O.K."

" Why? " asked Eckels. They sat in the ancient wilderness. Far birds' cries blew on a wind, and the smell of tar and an old salt sea, moist grasses, and flowers the colour of blood.

" We don't want to change the future. We don't belong here in the past. The government doesn't *like* us here. We have to pay big money to keep our permit. A time machine is a damn finicky business. Not knowing it, we might kill an important animal, a small bird, a cockroach, a flower, thus destroying an important link in a growing species."

" That's not clear," said Eckels.

" All right," Travis continued, " say we accidentally kill one mouse here. That means all the future families of this one particular mouse are destroyed, right? "

" Right."

Travis said, " And all the families of the families of the families of that one mouse! With a stamp of your foot, you annihilate first one, then a dozen, then a thousand, a million, a *billion* possible mice! "

" So they're dead," said Eckels. " So what? "

" So what? " Travis snorted quietly. " Well, what about the foxes that'll need those mice to survive? For want of ten mice, a fox dies. For want of a fox, all manner of insects, vultures, infinite billions of life-forms are thrown into chaos and destruction. Sixty million years later, a cave-man, one of a dozen in the *entire world*, goes hunting wild boars or sabre-toothed tigers, for food. But you, friend, have stepped on all the tigers in that region. By stepping on *one* single mouse.

" So the cave-man starves. And the cave-man, please note, is not just *any* expendable man, no! He is an *entire future nation.* From his loins would have sprung ten sons. From their loins

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one hundred sons, and thus onward to a civilization. Destroy this one man, and you destroy a race, a people, an entire history. It is comparable to slaying some of Adam's grandchildren. The stamp of your foot on one mouse could start an earthquake, the effects of which could shake our destinies down through Time, to their very foundations.

"With the death of that one cave-man, a billion unborn are throttled in the womb. Perhaps Rome never rises on her seven hills. Perhaps Europe is for ever a dark forest. Step on a mouse and leave your print, a Grand Canyon across eternity. Washington might not cross the Delaware. There might never be a United States at all. So be careful. Stay on the Path!"

"Then," said Eckels, "it would be dangerous for us even to touch the *grass*?"

"Correct. Crushing certain plants could add up, infinitesimally. A little error here would multiply in sixty million years, out of all proportion. Of course, maybe our theory is wrong. Maybe Time can't be changed by us. Or maybe it can be changed only in little, subtle ways. A dead mouse here makes an insect imbalance there, a population disproportion later, a bad harvest further on, a depression, mass starvation, and, finally, a change in *social* temperament in far-flung countries. Something more subtle, like that.

"But until we know for certain whether our messing around in Time *can* make a big or little change in history, we're being careful. This machine, the Path, your clothing and bodies were made sterile, as you know, before the journey. We wear these oxygen helmets so we can't introduce our bacteria into an ancient era."

"How do we know which animals to shoot?"

"They're marked with red paint," said Travis. "Today, before our trip, we sent Lesperance here with the Machine. He came to this particular era and followed certain animals."

"Studying them?"

"Right," said Lesperance. "I track them through their entire existence, noting which of them live long. Very few. How many times they mate. Not often. Life's short.

"When I find one that's going to die when a tree falls on him, or one that drowns in a tar pit, I note the exact hour, minute, and second. I shoot a paint bomb. It leaves a red patch on his hide. We can't miss it. Then I correlate our arrival in the past so that we meet the monster not more than two minutes before he would have died anyway. This way, we kill animals with no future, that are never going to mate again. You see how *careful* we are?"

"But if you came back this morning, in Time," said Eckels

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eagerly, "you must've bumped into *us*, our safari! How did it turn out? Was it successful? Did all of us get through—alive?"

Travis and Lesperance gave each other a look.

"That'd be a paradox," said Lesperance. "Time doesn't permit that sort of mess—a man meeting himself. When such occasions threaten, Time steps aside. Like an aeroplane hitting an air pocket. You felt the Machine jump just before we stopped? That was us passing ourselves on the way back to the future. We saw nothing. There's no way of telling if this expedition was a success, if we got our monster, or whether all of us—meaning *you*, Mr. Eckels—got out alive."

Eckels smiled palely.

"Cut that," said Travis sharply. "Everyone on his feet!"

They were ready to leave the Machine.

The jungle was high and the jungle was broad and the jungle was the entire world for ever and for ever. Sounds like music and sounds like flying tents filled the sky, and those were pterodactyls flying with cavernous grey wings, gigantic bats out of a delirium and a night fever. Eckels, balanced on the narrow path, aimed his rifle playfully.

"Forbidden!" said Travis. "Don't even aim for fun. If your gun should go off—"

Eckels flushed. "Where's our Tyrannosaurus?"

Lesperance checked his wristwatch. "Up ahead. We'll bisect his trail in sixty seconds. Look for the red paint, for God's sake. Don't shoot till we give the word. Stay on the Path. *Stay on the Path!*"

They moved forward in the wind of morning.

"Strange," murmured Eckels. "Up ahead, sixty million years, Election Day over. Keith made President. Everyone celebrating. And here we are, a million years lost, and they don't exist. The things we worried about for months, a lifetime, not even born or thought about yet."

"Safety catches off, everyone!" ordered Travis. "You first shot, Eckels. Second, Billings. Third, Kramer."

"I've hunted tiger, wild boar, buffalo, elephant, but this is *it*!" said Eckels. "I'm shaking like a kid."

"Ah!" said Travis. Everyone stopped.

Travis raised his hand. "Ahead," he whispered. "In the mist. There he is. There's his royal majesty now."

The jungle was wide and full of twitterings, rustlings, murmurs, and sighs. Suddenly it all ceased, as if someone had shut a door. Silence. A sound of thunder.

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Out of the mist, one hundred yards away, came Tyrannosaurus rex.

"Good lord," whispered Eckels.

"Sh!"

It came on great, oiled, resilient, striding legs. It towered twenty feet above trees, a huge evil god, folding its delicate watchmaker's claws to its oily, reptilian chest. Each lower leg was a piston, a thousand pounds of white bone sunk in thick ropes of muscle, sheathed over in a gleam of pebbled skin like the mail of a terrible warrior. Each thigh was a ton of meat, ivory, and steel mesh. And from the great breathing cage of the upper body those two delicate arms dangled out in front, arms with hands which might pick up and examine men like toys, while the snake neck coiled. And the head, a ton of sculptured stone itself, lifted easily upon the sky. Its mouth gaped, exposing a fence of teeth like daggers. Its eyes rolled, ostrich eggs empty of all expression save hunger.

It ran, its pelvic bones crushing aside trees and bushes, its taloned feet clawing damp earth, leaving prints six inches deep wherever it settled its weight. It ran with a gliding ballet step, far too poised and balanced for its ten tons. It moved into a sunlit arena, warily, its beautiful reptile hands feeling the air.

"My lord." Eckels twisted his mouth. "It could reach up and grab the moon."

"Sh!" Travis said angrily. "He hasn't seen us yet."

"It can't be killed." Eckels pronounced this verdict quietly, as if there could be no argument. He had weighed the evidence, and this was his considered opinion. The rifle in his hands seemed a cap gun. "We were fools to come. This is impossible."

"Shut up," hissed Travis.

"Nightmare."

"Turn round," commanded Travis. "Walk quietly to the Machine. We'll remit one half your fee."

"Didn't realize it would be this *big*," said Eckels. "Miscalculated. I must get out."

"It sees us!"

"There's the red paint, on its chest!"

The Tyrannosaurus raised itself. Its armoured flesh glittered like a thousand green coins. The coins, crusted with slime, steamed. In the slime, tiny insects wriggled, so that the entire body seemed to twitch and undulate, even while the monster itself did not move. It exhaled. The stink of raw flesh blew down the wilderness.

"Get me out," said Eckels. His mouth moved several times.

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A few words fell from his tongue. His jaw worked. " Too much. Too much. Never. Never like this before."

Then he made a series of grunting sounds, as if he had been hit, very hard, in the stomach.

" Don't run," said Lesperance. " Turn round. Hide in the Machine."

" Yes." Eckels seemed to be numb. He looked at his feet, as if he were trying to make them move. He gave another helpless grunt and started out.

" Eckels! "

He took a few steps, blinking, shuffling.

" Not *that* way! "

The monster, at the first motion, lunged forward with a terrible scream. It covered one hundred yards in a few seconds. The rifles jerked up and blazed fire. A windstorm from the beast's mouth engulfed them in the stench of slime and old blood. The monster roared, teeth glittering with sun.

Eckels, not looking back, walked blindly to the edge of the Path, his gun limp in his arms, stepped off the Path, and walked, not knowing it, in the jungle. His feet sank into green moss. His legs moved him. He felt alone, remote from the event behind.

The rifles cracked again. Their sound was lost in shriek and lizard thunder. The great lever of the reptile's tail swung up and lashed sideways. Trees exploded in clouds of leaf and branch. The monster twitched its jeweller's hands down to fondle at the men, to twist them in half, to crush them like berries, to cram them into its teeth and its screaming throat. Its boulder-stone eyes levelled with the men. They saw themselves mirrored. They fired at the metallic eyelids and the blazing black iris.

Like a stone idol, like a mountain avalanche, Tyrannosaurus fell. Thundering, it clutched trees, pulled them with it. It wrenched and tore the metal Path. The men flung themselves back. The body hit, ten tons of cold flesh and stone. The guns fired. The monster lashed its armoured tail, twitched its snake jaws, and lay still. A fount of blood spurted from its throat. Somewhere inside, a sac of fluids burst. Sickening gushes drenched the hunters. They stood, red and glistening.

The thunder faded. The jungle was silent. After the avalanche, a green peace. After the nightmare, morning.

In the time machine, on his face, Eckels lay shivering. He had found his way back to the Path and climbed into the Machine.

Travis came walking, glanced at Eckels, took cotton gauze from a metal box, and returned to the others, who were sitting on the Path. " Clean up."

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They wiped the blood from their helmets. The monster lay, a hill of solid flesh. Within, you could hear the sighs and murmurs as the farthest chambers of it died, the organs malfunctioning, liquids running a final instant from pocket to sac to spleen, everything shutting off, closing up for ever.

It was a little like standing by a steam-engine watching all the valves being released or levered tight. Bones cracked; the tonnage of its own flesh, off balance, dead weight, snapped the delicate forearms, caught underneath. The meat settled, quivering. Another cracking sound. A heavy tree broke from its mooring and fell. It crashed upon the dead beast with finality.

"There." Lesperance checked his watch. "Right on time. That's the tree that was scheduled to fall and kill this animal, originally." He glanced at the two hunters. "You want the trophy picture?"

"What?"

"We can't take a trophy back to the future. The body has to stay right here where it would have died originally; so the insects, birds, and bacteria can get at it, as they were intended to. Everything in balance. The body stays. But we *can* take a picture of you standing near it."

The two men tried to think, but gave up, shaking their heads. They let themselves be led along the metal Path. They sank wearily into the Machine cushions. They gazed back at the ruined monster, the stagnating mound, where already strange reptilian birds and golden insects were busy at the steaming armour.

A sound on the floor of the time machine stiffened them. Eckels sat there, shivering.

"I'm sorry," he said at last.

"Get up!" cried Travis.

Eckels got up.

"Go out on that Path alone," said Travis. He had his rifle pointed. "You're not coming back in the Machine. We're leaving you here!"

Lesperance seized Travis's arm. "Wait!"

"Stay out of this!" Travis shook his hand away. "This stupid fool nearly killed us. But it isn't *that* so much. Hell, no. It's his *shoes*! *Look* at them! He ran off the Path. My God, that ruins us! Who knows how much we'll forfeit! Tens of thousands of dollars of insurance! We guarantee no one leaves the Path. He left it. Oh, the damn fool! I'll have to report to the government. They might revoke our licence to travel. God knows *what* he's done to Time, to History!"

"Take it easy. All he did was kick up some dirt."

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"How do we know?" cried Travis. "We don't know anything! It's all a damn mystery! Get out there, Eckels!"

Eckels fumbled with his shirt. "I'll pay anything. A hundred thousand dollars!"

Travis glared at Eckels's cheque book and spat. "Go out there. The monster's next to the Path. Stick your arms up to your elbows in his mouth. Then you can come back with us."

"That's unreasonable!"

"The monster's dead. The bullets! The bullets can't be left behind. They don't belong in the past—they might change something. Here's my knife. Dig them out!"

The jungle was alive again, full of the old tremors and bird cries. Eckels turned slowly to stare at that primeval garbage dump, that hill of nightmares and terror. After a long time, like a sleepwalker, he shuffled out along the Path.

He returned, shuddering, five minutes later, his arms soaked and red to the elbows. He held out his hands. Each held a number of steel bullets.

Then he fell. He lay where he fell, not moving.

"You didn't have to make him do that," said Lesperance.

"Didn't I? It's too early to tell." Travis nudged the still body. "He'll live. Next time he won't go hunting game like this. O.K." He jerked his thumb wearily at Lesperance. "Switch on. Let's go home."

1492 . . . 1776 . . . 1812.

They cleaned their hands and faces. They changed their caking shirts and pants. Eckels was up and around again, not speaking. Travis glared at him for a full ten minutes.

"Don't look at me," cried Eckels. "I haven't done anything."

"Who can tell?"

"Just ran off the Path, that's all. A little mud on my shoes—What do you want me to do—get down and pray?"

"We might need it. I'm warning you, Eckels, I might kill you yet. I've got my gun ready."

"I'm innocent. I haven't done anything!"

1999 . . . 2000 . . . 2056. The Machine stopped.

"Get out," said Travis.

The room was as they had left it. The same man sat behind the same desk.

Travis looked around, suspiciously. "Everything O.K. here?" he snapped.

"Fine. Welcome home!"

Travis relaxed. "O.K., Eckels, get out," he said. "Don't ever come back."

Eckels didn't move.

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"You heard me," said Travis. "What're you staring at?"

Eckels stared at the sign on the office wall, the same sign he had seen earlier that day, when he had first come into the room. But somehow the sign had changed.

TIEME SEFARI, INC.
SEFARIS TU ANY YEER EN THE PAST
YU NAIM THE ANIMALL
WEE TAEK YU THAIR
YU SHOOT ITT

Eckels felt himself fall into a chair. He fumbled crazily at the thick slime on his boots. He held up a clod of dirt, trembling. "No, it *can't* be. Not a little thing like that! No!"

Embedded in the mud, glistening green and gold and black, was a butterfly, very beautiful, and very dead.

"Not a little thing like *that*! Not a butterfly!" cried Eckels.

It fell to the floor, an exquisite thing, a small thing that could upset balances and knock down a line of small dominoes and then big dominoes and then gigantic dominoes, all down the years across Time. Eckels's mind whirled. It *couldn't* change things. Killing one butterfly couldn't be that important! Could it?

His face was cold. His mouth trembled, asking: "Who—who won the Presidential election yesterday?"

The man behind the desk laughed. "You joking? You know damn well. Lyman, of course! Who else? Not that damn weakling Keith. We got an iron man now, man with guts!" The official stopped. "What's wrong?"

Eckels moaned. He dropped to his knees. He scrabbled at the golden butterfly with shaking fingers. "Can't we," he pleaded to the world, to himself, to the officials, to the Machine, "can't we take it back, can't we *make* it alive again? Can't we start over again? Can't we—?"

He looked up into Travis's angry, frightened face.

Travis shook his head.

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to ASSORTED FANCIES on page 27

1. *A red ensign (unless you belong to a yacht club using a special ensign)*
2. *Yes, unless the worm and the ball are in a bunker*
3. *By Act of Parliament in 1871*
4. *H.R.H. Prince Charles*
5. *a. Sir John Tenniel; b. George du Maurier; c. Mendoza; d. John Reynolds*
6. *a. St. Denys; b. St. James; c. St. David; d. St. Andrew*
7. *George Bernard Shaw*

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RED HAIR

She stood before me in black lace
not immodest but not shy

BY JOHN INGLIS HALL

"YOU will come and stay with us. For a week, for two weeks—how long does not matter."

The old man with the deep-lined brown face looked first at me then at the half-dozen young men sitting on wooden benches round the long table under the chestnut trees in the garden at the back of the fonda of San Firmin de Agudia. It was midday and not a breath of wind stirred the heavy canopy of leaves. The July heat was a weight on the mind, a deadness in the limbs. A few starveling hens scratched and pecked in the dust at our feet. Flies crawled among the pools of drying wine on the table and hummed in the air round our heads.

"Sí, niños," he said, looking round at the young men, and his black eyes, hooded against the sun, glittered. "He must stay with us, verdad? Tourists, they come here to San Firmin de Agudia and drink their wine for an hour, then go on in their big cars—but they never come to La Piedra Santa. There is no road. But you, señorito, you come on foot with a pack on your back—like ordinary men, like ourselves."

He raised a gnarled, lined, dry hand, and laid it on my shoulder, familiarly but firmly. "So you will come to us," he said. "To La Piedra Santa, to the hills . . ."

He clapped his hands loudly, and after a moment, the owner of the fonda, a huge, elderly, untidy man in his shirtsleeves, shuffled out through a doorway at the end of the courtyard, shading his eyes with his hand from the glare of the sun.

"Patrón," the old man called. "More wine for our guest, for ourselves." Then he turned to me again. "Your name, friend?" he asked. "Juan," I said, translating.

"Good," he said. "We will call you Juan el Rubio because of your red hair. At La Piedra Santa, the women will like you, Don Juan. Our men are all black, like my sons and nephews here." He made a gesture round the table with his right hand, and they all laughed, watching me curiously, as though I were

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something valuable that they had found, which might yet evade them.

"Their names are Pepe, Tomás, and Mario, my sons. Gregorio, Juan, and Alfonso, my nephews. Meet them!" he said, pointing to each one in turn.

As he pronounced their names, they stood up one by one and bowed to me gracefully. They were dressed in coarse white linen shirts and dark blue cloth trousers. I bowed to each one in return. I was a little tipsy with the wine I had drunk.

"Thank you. I will come to La Piedra Santa," I said in my halting Spanish. "I expect I can stay at the fonda."

They all laughed again, and the old man said, "Yes, that is true. The fonda is mine, and you will be our guest. We shall give a fiesta specially for you, Don Juan. Specially for you. You will see." The old man fixed me with his shining, narrow eyes, humorous, yet impenetrable, and hiding secrets.

The Patrón came back with a big blue glazed earthenware jug of wine and set it down on the table in front of us. He had a dewlap and a great belly which bulged over the top of his tight trousers, and his round, wrinkled face was shrewd and smiling. "The wine, Don Carlos," he said. "The best in San Firmin de Agudia. Count on it."

"I know, friend," said the old one. "It is as good as our wine at La Piedra Santa—that is to say, almost as good."

"As good," said the other.

"As good, then, so be it. Juan el Rubio here, an Englishman, comes with us this evening to La Piedra Santa. He is a good boy, I think," he continued. For a few moments, the two men discussed me, almost as though I were not there. Finally, the Patrón laughed and poured the wine; then he looked at me closely and dispassionately, as though I were a horse or a beast of burden up for sale.

"Yes," he said, "I think he is a good strong boy; and he has red hair. He will do well."

Then, looking round at the company, he winked, a huge, all-embracing wink which was enough for the whole company to share—a tremendous wink which might have meant anything or nothing. Probably nothing.

"I'll water the mules: then they can sleep until you go," he said, and left us.

It was late in the afternoon when we rode out of San Firmin de Agudia. The brazen summer sky had paled and the Pyrenees, far off, were dark blue, shading to a deep purple on the horizon. Part of the foothills lay in shadow, part was lit by the russet

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brilliance of the westering sun. The empty village which I had reached on foot that morning, on the first stage of my walking-tour, breakfasting alone at the fonda on eggs and bread and garlic washed down with red wine, teemed with evening life. The main street was full of people, jostling and talking loudly to one another. Women of all ages leaned from the windows above the narrow street and yelled shrilly to their companions across the way.

Mounted on our sleepy mules, we pushed through the crowd, shouting to the people to make way. Some of them slapped our mules as we passed. I was dazed with the wine and could not understand most of what was said, but from the windows above us I picked out again and again, from the women, the cry: "Mira, el Rubio! Qué rubio! Mira, el Rubio!"

They were talking about my red hair.

Outside the village, we left the main road with its metalled surface, for a rough, dusty track. The mules' hoofs whispered in the dust, and I swayed in my saddle to their muffled patter. Old Carlos Ybarra, for I had discovered that was his name, rode beside me, talking loudly, a big wineskin slung across the front of his saddle. He was far gone in wine and I could hardly understand him, or he me, but we chattered incessantly.

After half an hour, we were looking down on San Firmin, straggling below us in its deep valley, between the parched hills. The view was awesome, and as the light faded, silence settled on the evening world. A light breeze began to blow, cooling our hot heads. One of the young men began to sing a flamenco song, and the others joined in.

Gradually, I became sober, and began to appreciate my adventure. I was riding into the high Pyrenees, to an unknown place where few tourists ever penetrated, just as I had dreamt of doing in London, so far off, so remote, so unreal.

At last the song ended—it was very long and very plaintive—and I could ask Don Carlos how far it was to La Piedra Santa.

He leaned over and laid a hand on my knee. "We shall get there tomorrow afternoon," he said. "But don't worry. We shall sleep on the way in a shepherd's hut. In about four hours."

The sun had vanished. A great moon rose slowly, round and pale, lighting the path we were treading, turning the red dust to white and darkening the valleys to mysterious black clefts and hollows. The trees became living beings, standing like disturbed sentinels, their leaves rattling soft warnings. Several times, I fell asleep and was caught by one or other of the party, riding beside me. Gradually, all sense of the beauty of the moonlit world left me, and I was conscious only of the pain of staying awake and remaining in the saddle.

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Around me, my companions laughed and joked, sometimes jabbing an elbow in my ribs, sometimes shouting a phrase at me. I rode in a trance, on and on, until at last, after many hours, we crossed a mountain stream, and on the other side of it, I saw a hut loom up. The others jumped from the saddle, but I remained sitting my mule, utterly without will.

"Catch the young one," I heard a voice say as I fell, then knew nothing more until I awoke in broad daylight, wrapped in my own blanket, on the bare earth floor of the hut.

Old Don Carlos was looking down at me. "Good morning, Juan el Rubio," he said, smiling. "You slept. We have all slept; and it is morning."

I sat up, thinking of the night before, of the drinking at San Firmin, of the long ride, of where I was going. The others came into the hut, laughing, their heads glistening with water. I could hear outside the music of the flowing stream. I rolled up my blanket and went out into the morning. It was five o'clock by my watch.

The sky was cloudless, shining, pale; down below us, on every side, hills, valleys, and clumps of trees stood out stark and clear, as though washed clean by the piercing, pure morning air and coloured by the newly risen sun. The mules, hobbled, grazed on the thin grass beside the stream. Pepe led me to it by the arm and I drank deeply of the icy water. It was sweet and clean and I dipped my head in it, screwing my fists into my eyes, then ran my fingers through my soaked curly hair.

They gave me bread and onion and strong cheese, and I ate greedily. With my mouth full, I asked, "Where is La Piedra Santa?"

They pointed upwards, over the hills. "Lejos, muy lejos—far, very far, and higher."

Soon we mounted, and were moving once more at the mules' small, shuffling trot, leaving behind us a thin cloud of grey dust that rose like smoke, then settled again. Pepe and Alfonso led the singing as we went. Gradually, the scene grew wilder and the hills barer. The sun rose hotter and hotter above us. There was no living thing save ourselves to be seen. Sometimes we stopped for wine, and each of the party in turn showed me how to spurt the thin red jet from the wineskin down my throat. My shirt became spattered with wine, and they told me how their women would laugh at me when they saw it.

"Wait until our sister, Rosalía, sees you," said Mario. "Wait!" And they all laughed.

Just before midday, we entered a narrow, precipitous valley, up which spiralled a rough, stony track. The drop into the

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valley must have been nearly a thousand feet, and it took us the best part of two hours to reach the top. Then, ahead of us, a mile away, perched on its own pointed hill, I saw a very small battlemented village, built round a miniature castle and a church.

We stopped, and my hosts pointed to it.

"Your village, Juan el Rubio. Your village. Our village—La Piedra Santa. Welcome!"

It was like a place from a dream of childhood, from a book of fairy-tales—grey roofs, austere white walls, shining under the glaring hard sun. We rode on and, twenty minutes later, passed through an ancient gate with primitive stone statues of men in full armour on either side of it. I thought of London, very far away, centuries away.

In the streets, as we trotted by, everyone greeted us. As in San Firmin de Agudia, the women looked down on us from their windows, called to the men raucously, and were answered in their turn, and I heard the same cry as before welcome me: "Qué rubio! Mira, el Rubio!"

Out of the tiny main square of the town, cobbled, with a magnificent fountain in the centre of it from which a four-headed, twin-bodied lion spat translucent jets of water, we rode under the arch of the fonda and dismounted in a small, cool courtyard, leading into a larger courtyard where tables were set out under a trellised vine. A young man with a strange expression on his face, small, bent, and apelike, resembling a Velasquez court dwarf, held my mule for me while I dismounted. I thanked him, but he only made inarticulate sounds in reply.

Don Carlos took me by the arm. "Poor Luisito is deaf and dumb," he said. "We have many such here in La Piedra Santa—two in my own family, including Luisito. It is a curse of God." He crossed himself.

Inside the house, at the end of a long passage, a great bare room opened out, set with oaken tables and chairs.

"Here is where the gallants of the village meet to drink during the cold evenings in winter. Now, they go outside in the great courtyard, under the vine," said Don Carlos.

A moment later, a diminutive, elderly lady, sharp-eyed, dressed in black with a black mantilla, bustled into the room. "Carlos!" she cried.

"Estrellita!" he said, taking her by the arm. "Here is the young Englishman we found at San Firmin and invited to stay with us. We call him Juan el Rubio. Look after him well. He is our guest."

She greeted me warmly, then they went outside for a moment and I heard them talking together in rapid Spanish in the passage-

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way. A few minutes later, they came back and led me up a flight of worn oak stairs, bare and dark, and into a high-ceilinged room with a great four-poster bed in it. One massive cupboard, also of oak, and two chairs with leather seats were the only other furniture. I suspected at once that it was their own room and protested.

The old lady smiled. "What if it is?" she said. "It is our choice. We have few guests and they are very important to us. Don Juan, our house is yours. Please look upon it thus." She smiled, dropped me a little curtsy, and they left the room together.

The room had a curious scent about it—herbs and spices, coriander, pepper, saffron, cloves—but though fragrant, it was rather airless. I went over and opened the single large window. It overlooked an enclosed courtyard. Outside the window, there was a wooden balcony which ran round the courtyard, and evidently served as a passage to all the rooms on that floor. Mine, I noted, was the only room that had an ordinary window instead of a french window.

I stood there for a moment, looking out at the hard shadow and sun of the courtyard, with the square of deep blue sky above it. When my eyes were accustomed to the contrasts, I noticed suddenly that I was being watched intently from the room exactly opposite my own, by a young woman, olive-skinned and dark-eyed, with jet-black hair. She realized that I had seen her and vanished behind a curtain. I remembered my journey up to La Piedra Santa, and the name Rosalía . . .

It was from that moment, when I retired modestly from my bedroom window, just as the girl had retired from hers, and closed my curtains, that there began that extraordinary miraculous time of carnival, which lasted until I left the village.

First, Mario, gay and talkative, came to my room with his mother and laid out on the great bed a white linen shirt with a loose collar, tight black trousers, a short black jacket, and black buckled shoes. Mario and I were much of a size, and I found that his clothes fitted me perfectly, even the shoes.

As I dressed, somebody below in the courtyard began to pluck a guitar, then another joined in, and another. It was as though guests were arriving one by one and all could play. The sound of bagpipes suddenly shrilled out, followed by violins. The total noise should have been repellent, an absurd cacophony, but instead, it was music, infinitely gay, unlikely, naïve, and appealing; it mingled with the rising din of male voices in the courtyard.

I was excited, and became conscious of my heartbeat as I

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dressed. Mario, who had stayed to watch me, began to flip and snap his brown fingers to the music, and executed a small, precise, controlled little dance, back arched and head tilted, laughing. When I was ready, he opened the door of my room. The sound of the assembling guests came up to us more loudly.

"Venga, Juan el Rubio—come, John the Red," he said, taking me by the arm. "The whole village is waiting for you."

As I entered the big courtyard, everyone stood up. They were seated, men and women, young and old, at rough wooden tables, laid out with whole cheeses, great loaves of black bread, sausages, and big glazed earthenware jugs brimming with dark red wine. Don Carlos came forward to greet me and held up his hand. There was a great shout of "Hai!" from the company, then sudden, complete silence.

For a second, it was within my power to break it when I chose. I said nothing, amazed at the whole scene. Then Don Carlos laughed and suddenly ran his fingers roughly through my red hair. "Mira!" he cried triumphantly. "Mira! Qué rubio!"

There was a rippling murmur, not entirely of laughter—not quite—but not far from it. It contained surprise, pleasure, admiration, I hardly knew what. They brought me a big earthenware tankard filled to the brim with wine, and I drank with Don Carlos, who sat beside me, a hand on my arm, as though I were his property, as though I belonged to him.

"Don Carlos," I said, "what fiesta is this?"

"Your fiesta," he said with sudden emphasis, leaning towards me across the corner of our table. As he did so, those around us smiled at me in a way I cannot quite describe. It was friendly, amiable, enigmatic, amused, but somehow intensely earthy and animal. They suddenly behaved with great familiarity towards me, all of them, as though I were a close relation, not a guest.

The music now began to play—that strange, strange orchestra of twenty or thirty pieces—curious little melodies, and the younger men and women, of my own age, got up with one accord and, with arms round one another's waists, danced a lively, rolling, swinging, jumping dance that I had never in my life seen before.

We rose and walked about from table to table, and Don Carlos presented me to person after person, men and women. At last we sat down. They filled my tankard again, and Don Carlos and I drank together.

"This is the fiesta you promised me then?" I asked.

The old man nodded his head, laughing. "Tell me," I said, "why is it that some we go up to speak, and others say nothing?" I had noticed this as we moved about among the tables.

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"It's nothing," he said. "Nothing. For there is nothing that can be done. We are a very lonely community. There are many deformed people, many deaf-and-dumb. You remember Luisito in my own family? Yet, though they cannot speak with you, they are glad of your coming. They have told me in the language of the hands . . ."

He stopped for a moment, then looked up. "Ah, here comes one who is neither deaf nor dumb—my daughter Rosalía. Come, child, here is our stranger, Juan el Rubio . . ."

I rose to my feet.

She stood in front of me, dressed in black lace, with a dark red flower in her hair, not shy, but not immodest, with brilliant eyes, deep violet in colour, blue-black hair piled on top of her head, and long hands linked together in front of her. Behind her, Doña Estrella walked, also in black, but she did not stay to display her daughter, to take a bow as a mother might out of pride, on account of her girl's beauty. Instead, she went at once and sat down beside Don Carlos.

Rosalía stood still, looking at me, appraising me. I had good wine in me and was exceedingly bold, staring back, holding her eyes with mine. In the end, I laughed and gave her my hand. Immediately, we joined in the dance. The crowd cheered, and suddenly all those who were not dancing began to beat time to the music with their hands, clapping.

I spoke to Rosalía as we danced. "You have seen me before," I said mockingly, "from your window. I am no stranger to you."

She gave me the shadow of a smile, subtly shaded, mysterious, meaningless or meaningful. Which, it was impossible to tell. "True," she said, "I saw you. But I was not close enough to discover what is behind your eyes. I wanted to."

"Have you discovered it finally?" I asked, still mocking. "What is there?"

"A man," she said. "Nothing more. A man. That is enough."

She laughed gaily and, with strong arms round my waist, swung me in the dance, and I responded. She was light but hard-muscled, powerful and pliable as a whip. We looked into each other's eyes as we danced. It went on for a very long time, though it seemed very short. When at last we gave in together—neither of us would yield singly—we went and sat down beside Don Carlos and Doña Estrella, and it was twilight. Above the village, the clear sky was becoming spangled with stars.

As Don Carlos poured me wine, he said to his daughter, "A good man! He dances with decision and strength. He tamed you."

Rosalía looked pleased.

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" Juan el Rubio, it is very well," he added, and patted my knee with his hand.

Babel was all around us, swinging, swaying, finger-snapping, shouting. Sometimes a few of the musicians stopped, came over quickly from their raised platform to the tables, drank and ate ravenously, then returned to their playing.

A curious pattern began to make itself observed among the dancers; they crowded round us; they swayed in and out before us where we sat. There was a magnificent, tranced madness about their faces, parted lips, and brilliant, shining eyes. Then the orchestra came down from the platform, in a scraping, twanking, blowing, musical disorder, and took its place at the head of the forming and re-forming grand chain. Between them and the leading dancers there appeared a space which I knew instantly was ours.

Rosalía and I took it together, suddenly, moved by the same urge and resolve. Immediately, the whole procession was on the move, and out into the square. Torches blazed and I found one thrust into my right hand. My left was round the waist of Rosalía.

We danced first through the narrow streets, like children after twoscore Pied Pipers, then out of the gates of the village and to the surrounding hills, to the bare rocks warmed by the departed sun, to the terraced vineyards.

Slowly, very slowly, the music disintegrated into separate groups of players, then into twos and threes, then into crazed, plaintive singletons at lone vantage-points, blowing or fiddling solo to the stars. Then there was silence, and one by one the torches went out, my own among them. The moon sailed luminous and serene over the tops of the hills . . .

When we got home, the fonda was dark and silent, but every door was open. We climbed the stairs on stockinged feet to my room.

When I woke up late the following afternoon, I was still in a daze of wine and drowsiness, but I could remember, I thought, that there had been a long time that night when I had not been alone.

There followed two strange, short weeks when days of hunting alternated with evenings of carnival, without a touch of why and wherefore to stain or spoil it for me. I lived in a wild state, wholly unable to stop and think.

Don Carlos, in a curious manner, counted my days for me, watched my time as it passed, and warned me of my diminishing store of hours. His wife spoilt me, laundered for me as for a favourite son, and cooked huge, peppery, aromatic meals which

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the household ate together amid a babel of noise. Nobody seemed to bother their heads in the least about my relationship with Rosalía, least of all Rosalía herself. She was extraordinary. Aloof and beautifully detached, she acted as though nothing was happening.

On Sundays we went to church, the men separated from the women, and I sat and watched her, veiled and good as gold, head bowed, demure, deceitful, and I wondered what was expected of me in my incomprehensible situation. I spoke about it at last to Don Carlos. He affected barely to understand my Spanish, or my meaning. He dismissed my halting phrases most beautifully, with a regal, small irony that would have done credit to an ancient nobleman.

"Expected? Why, Don Juan, nothing. We found you and brought you here, to show you life in a village in high Spain. What have you done, a man, which would require my advice? You have seen us, drunk wine with us, hunted with us, and danced with our women at a time of carnival when the world lives freely. My house has been yours, as it should be. Nothing more."

I questioned Rosalía. I asked her, provided her father consented, could I return within a year and marry her. It was my last day at La Piedra Santa. Next morning, at dawn, we were to start on the long ride down to San Firmin de Agudia.

She looked at me for a very long time, then slowly, but very decisively, shook her head. "No," she said. "Even if you were older. You could not live here with us. And I would not leave here to go with you—even if it were possible. You are too young. I have loved you, true. But so have others."

She smiled at me enigmatically, and I began to protest. I told her that this was not true, that I had loved no other woman.

She laughed and nodded her head. "You have loved other women," she said. "I know it."

"Does it matter?" I asked.

"No," she said.

Nevertheless, the refusal was final. Next day, heavy-hearted, I walked beside our mule-train to the gate of La Piedra Santa, with its two antique stone men in armour standing guard right and left outside. Rosalía walked with us, in calm, friendly fashion, not alone but accompanied by six of her companions in their best dresses.

It was a curiously formal, unemotional farewell. We shook hands clumsily, and were inarticulate and empty of vows. I waved to them as we rode off, and they waved to me until the gates of La Piedra Santa were out of sight . . .

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Many years later, I happened to be talking at my club with a friend, Martin Blair, an anthropologist who specializes in village and tribal customs in remote places, and by chance told him this story. He was fascinated and excited and said how wonderful it was, and how rare a thing to have happened in modern times.

"In remote places—high mountain villages and so on—they suffered badly from inbreeding," he explained. "In fact, they still do. It can't be avoided; but it weakens the stock. In the old days, when communications were really bad, male visitors from outside were—what shall I say?—much appreciated . . ."

He looked at me, laughing. I remember I was furious for a moment. After all, for nearly twenty-five years I had believed that what had come about was at least partly due to the irresistible lure of my personality! Worse was to follow.

"Tell me," Martin Blair continued, "did Rosalía always visit you in the dark?"

"Why yes," I said, surprised. "After the first night, always. Why?"

"I just wondered about the other ladies who saw you off at the gate," he said.

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ON SALE AUGUST 10

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THERE was no longer any doubt that Dr. Francis Barnwelder was going to take the London plane. Even after Dr. Barnwelder had given in his luggage and cleared his passport, Jim Briscoe had remained doubtful, because it was never wise to underestimate anyone on the Barnwelder level. Jim Briscoe glanced across the passengers' waiting-space at Idlewild Airport. The small man in the dark coat was still standing near the barber's shop reading his newspaper.

If Dr. Barnwelder had suspected he was being watched, he gave no sign of it; but then, why should he? There had been a routine check on him during all the years he had worked in secret installations, and no doubt anyone gradually became immune to personal attention.

If he had been Barnwelder, Jim Briscoe was thinking—granted that Barnwelder was the man he was almost sure he was—he would not have done anything so obvious as to take Flight 401. The man must have known it was very dangerous indeed for him to go direct to London if things were the way Jim Briscoe believed. All he could think was that Dr. Barnwelder did not know how far the investigation had gone. If this was so, Jim Briscoe felt personally flattered, but after all, it never paid to be too sure of anything.

He would not be alive today, he was thinking, if he had not

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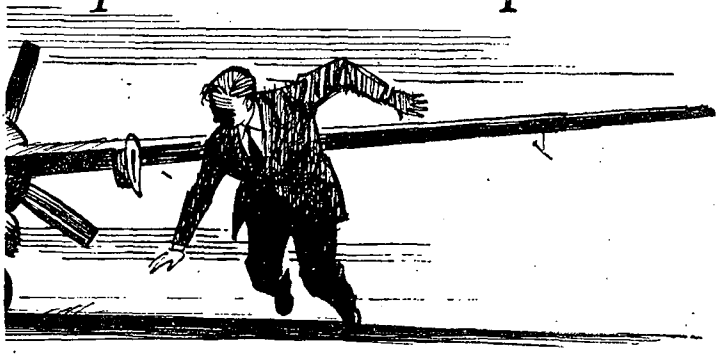
FORGET

by John P. Marquand



learnt never to indulge in overconfidence. There was a time in Rio, he recalled, when he had taken the precaution to brush clumsily against a waiter—and had learnt, while there was still time to do something about it, that the waiter was carrying a knife.

Perhaps, after all, Jim Briscoe thought, the most obvious course was the safest, and Dr. Barnwelder was blatantly indicating that he had nothing to conceal.

One of the attendants at the counter had picked up a hand microphone. "Passengers for Flight Four-O-One to London," he was saying," will now board at Gate Four B."

It was not advisable to display undue curiosity as the passengers gathered, carrying their overnight luggage, but Jim Briscoe watched them carefully while he appeared to be searching through his briefcase for his gate card.

Dr. Barnwelder came hurrying by, thrusting some last-minute purchases into his briefcase, a stoutish, round-faced man, with heavy lips and thick-lensed, rimless glasses, whose baldness showed at the back of his hat. His careless handling of his briefcase looked almost as though he were trying to prove to anyone who might be watching that he carried no secret papers.

But then, why should he?

Dr. Barnwelder was equipped to write down anything he wished

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to communicate in a series of equations that could reside in his brain tissue until the final minute of recording. For the purpose of communication he needed only another brain as competent as his. There would be no papers.

All Dr. Barnwelder had to do was to communicate with an individual who, according to word that had arrived that afternoon, had appeared unexpectedly in London. Jim Briscoe had been one of the few people who had predicted this appearance, which explained why he, too, was leaving on Flight 401.

Dr. Barnwelder had found his card, and now he passed through the gate, with Mrs. Barnwelder beside him. Jim Briscoe lingered a moment beside the airline counter.

"Are you all cleared, sir?" the clerk asked.

"Oh yes, thanks," Jim Briscoe answered, "now that I've found my card."

The attendant was a very reliable young man, who, Jim Briscoe was beginning to believe, might possibly have a professional future if he lived long enough. His question, according to previous agreement, meant that there had been no last-minute changes in the list.

"I see you've put me in seat thirty-six," Jim Briscoe said. "I hope I'm sitting next to some very pretty girl."

Jim Briscoe spoke loudly because it was time to be in character. He had used the cover successfully several times before. He was known as an ex-officer of the Marine Corps, and this detail was true. The name Briscoe was also his own, which made things easier; but he had suddenly acquired independent means, with a bank account and securities to prove it.

"Yes, Mr. Briscoe," the airline clerk said, and for a second the mask dropped. "The prettiest girl on the flight, Mr. Briscoe, according to my judgment. Miss Edith Olmstead, from Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania. She's a real pin-up girl. They're calling the flight again."

Jim Briscoe had grown so accustomed in the last ten years to being two people at once that he was no longer very conscious of the effort. He had a happy, anticipatory look as he climbed the steps to the plane, and he greeted the stewardess with a genial, warm interest that showed he was an eligible bachelor. Dr. and Mrs. Barnwelder were sitting where he had directed, to his left, just across the aisle, five seats ahead, where he could check on them readily without their noticing him.

Miss Edith Olmstead was already in the seat near the window, and Jim Briscoe smiled at her.

"Good afternoon," he said. "I see we're crossing the ocean together."

Jim Briscoe had observed that Miss Olmstead's forehead was broad and high, that her eyes were hazel-grey, large, and wide-set, that she had a small mole on her right cheek, and that the wave in the light brown hair above her forehead was natural. He had made mental notes of all these facts before he realized that Miss Olmstead was a very pretty girl.

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Grades of beauty had only a minor bearing in Jim Briscoe's profession, but he discovered himself mentally admitting, when he seated himself beside Miss Olmstead and put his briefcase securely beneath his seat, that beauty had very little to do with measurements or symmetry. Beauty, in the end, he supposed, was a matter of spirit and emotional adjustment. Miss Olmstead's mouth was too large and her nose was too short for academic perfection, but there was a freshness and vigour about her. She had taken off her white gloves, which now lay in her lap neatly folded over a black leather handbag, which she must have purchased especially for the trip, judging by its newness, a roomy, competent bag, large enough to carry a wallet and a purse for change, lipstick, a compact, passport, other papers, and possibly a small automatic.

This last idea came to him involuntarily, because he had no reason in the world to suspect that Miss Olmstead might be armed.

"I hope you're right about our crossing," Miss Olmstead said, and she laughed. "I hope we do get all the way over."

Jim Briscoe laughed reassuringly. "You sound as though this was your first trip abroad," he said.

"Oh no," Miss Olmstead answered. "I used to go to school in Switzerland, but this is the first time I've ever flown."

"Well," Jim Briscoe answered, "planes have their drawbacks, but they get you from one place to another pretty fast. May I hold your bag for you while you fasten your safety-belt?"

"Oh," she said. "Thank you. I forgot. I suppose it's just the same over the sea as it is on land—I mean, safety-belts at the take-off."

He wished that he could avoid that habit of his of weighing and balancing scraps of conversation. That remark of Miss Olmstead's about safety-belts sounded unusually naïve; but then she had not hesitated at all with her handbag. It seemed heavier than was necessary, but there was no movement inside that would indicate a heavy object. His instinctive precautions reminded Jim Briscoe of an old friend of his in Washington named Mr. Henry. Briscoe had admired Mr. Henry from the very first moment they had met at the beginning of the war. Mr. Henry knew everything at all worth knowing about their subject. Years of experience had mellowed him, and his remarkably shrewd understanding of people had developed into something that was a keen comprehension of human failings.

"If there is one thing we must all learn, Jim," Mr. Henry had said the last time Jim Briscoe had seen him, "it is not to be tense. Keep in mind the end result, and don't worry too much about the middle, except as regards women. Don't trust any of them when you're on a problem, particularly like the one on which you're working. Do you recall what Pope said?"

"Yes," Jim Briscoe had answered. "'Every woman is at heart a rake'—is that what you're thinking of?"

When Mr. Henry nodded, he looked like a teacher applauding the recitation of a favourite pupil, and Jim Briscoe could not help

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being flattered. Once, like other novices, Jim Briscoe had thought of Mr. Henry as being only another elderly authority on intelligence evaluation—until Mr. Henry had given him a lesson on strangulation with piano wire. Mr. Henry's technique had seemed considerably superior to that of an instructor at the secret installation who had been taught in Tokyo.

"That is the quotation of which I was thinking," Mr. Henry said. He sighed and lit his pipe.

"The thing that makes any woman a problem in our work is her violent loyalties. Hers are much more emotional than those of the average man, with a more personal connotation. She can be loyal at any given time both to one man and to some other man's beliefs."

Mr. Henry tamped down the tobacco in his pipe and relit it. "When you are in the field, always have the greatest reservations about any woman you may meet. No matter if you are sure you understand her, there's the danger of your mistaking her loyalty. I am still a believer in the adage that a woman's place is in the home."

"I agree with everything you say," Jim Briscoe said.

The steward demonstrated briskly and accurately the fitting and inflation of a Mae West life-jacket, and he took pains to point out the torch with which one might signal at night and the whistle that one could blow in the daytime in case one needed assistance. Jim Briscoe noticed that Miss Edith Olmstead gave the talk such undivided attention that he was sure she could not have heard it before.

"If we have to ditch—" she said. "That's what you say if a plane has to come down in the sea, isn't it?"

"Why yes," Jim Briscoe answered, "that's one way of putting it."

"If we have to ditch," she said, "how long will the plane float?"

"Not more than a minute or two," Jim Briscoe said, "and the chances are somewhere around half a minute, but don't let it spoil your trip." Miss Olmstead laughed easily, and he was faintly surprised at the quality of her laughter.

"How do you know so much about planes?" she asked. "How long they float and things like that."

Jim Briscoe quickly weighed what he was to answer, because any long pause would have been suspicious.

"Oh," he said, "I've been in aeroplanes quite a lot."

"Did you ever land on water?"

"Yes," Jim Briscoe answered, "but it was the Pacific, nice warm water. I was in the Marines at the time."

She did not speak when he paused. She was a nice girl, and she must have known that she was asking too many questions.

"You know, I should have introduced myself long ago," Jim Briscoe said. "My name's Briscoe, Jim Briscoe. I'm just going over to London for the ride."

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"My name's Edith Olmstead," she answered. "Over for the ride, too, but I hope to end up with some friends in Rome."

Jim Briscoe smiled, and his smile was completely genuine. "I wish I could see Rome this time," he said, "but it's going to be nice to look at London."

"Do you know we have a very important person on this plane?" Miss Olmstead asked.

"Why no," Jim Briscoe said. "Who is it? I didn't know we were carrying any V.I.P.'s."

"Dr. Francis Barnwelder, the atomic scientist," Miss Olmstead said. "He's that heavy-looking, bald-headed man, five seats up on the left."

"Is he really?" Jim Briscoe said. "How did you happen to find out?"

Her answer was so prompt he could not doubt its genuineness.

"Why, everyone knows," she said. "All the passengers were talking about him. Didn't you hear them?"

"I was pretty busy," he said, before he could check himself.

"You didn't look busy," she said, and she laughed. It was a natural and friendly laugh. "I was watching you from the bar."

"Oh," he said, "the bar. Your mentioning it brings up an interesting association of ideas. How would it be if we went to the smoking-lounge and tried to induce the steward to give us something, even if the half-hour isn't up?"

"I'd love to try," she said, "but I don't believe we'll get anywhere. The British are always so incorruptible."

This was another remark of hers that he thought, for a second, was unduly precocious; but then if she had gone to school in Switzerland, she had more than likely spent her holidays in England.

"We can only try," he said, "and hope. Occasionally one of them does relent and break the rule."

In fact, the bar steward did relent, and there was every reason why he should. His name was Jameson, and the C.I.D., at the request of the Foreign Office, had assigned him especially for the trip.

Once they were in the smoking-lounge, Jim Briscoe felt entirely at ease. Now he could relax and allow himself to appreciate the charms of Miss Olmstead. It was most agreeable to discover that she cared as much as he did for early Gothic architecture, especially the eccentricities of its ornamental sculpture as exemplified by the gargoyles of Notre Dame and Chartres.

"I never dreamt you'd know so much about this," she said. "I'm terribly anxious to know when you first saw a gargoyle. By the way, why don't we have another drink?"

"That's a very good idea," Jim Briscoe said, and he waved to the bar steward. "Two double whiskies, please."

"Doubles?" Miss Olmstead said.

"It was only a whim of mine," Jim Briscoe answered. "You don't have to drink all yours if you don't want to."

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"What else is there to do?" she asked. "Besides, I always like to finish what I start. I suppose we'll be having dinner soon."

Jim Briscoe glanced at his wristwatch and saw that Miss Olmstead was looking at it, too. It was a durable, practical timepiece, made of stainless steel and fastened on his wrist with an extra-heavy pigskin strap.

"Yes," he said, "they'll feed us before we get to Gander." He was trying to estimate the amount of daylight there might be left at Gander. Being summer, at that latitude it would not be dusk till nearly ten, and he preferred daylight, in the circumstances.

"You must do a lot of hunting and fishing and things like that when you're not thinking about gargoyles."

In that moment's abstraction he had almost forgotten Miss Olmstead.

"What makes you arrive at that conclusion?" he said.

"You've an outdoor kind of watch with a Swiss movement," she said, "and I happen to know it's quite expensive, because my father has one like it."

He should have known far better than to have worn the watch, but then Miss Olmstead had given him an interesting piece of information. Watches like his seldom cropped up in the real-estate-and-insurance circles her father moved in.

A minute later the passengers were told that dinner was being served. In the second that he waited for Miss Olmstead to reach her chair by the window, Jim Briscoe was able to examine his briefcase, which he had left so carelessly beneath his seat. It had not been touched. But then it was a very obvious business, monkeying with anyone's briefcase.

As soon as dinner was over, Miss Olmstead said that she was going to take a nap for a while as she had been up quite late the previous night with farewell parties.

She looked happy when she was asleep, which was rare according to Jim Briscoe's experience, because one's guard dropped with sleep, and if anyone was as happy as Miss Olmstead, she had nothing to conceal. Her lips wore the trace of a half smile.

Soon they touched down at Gander.

He was very glad that Miss Olmstead was not with him when someone took a shot at him, but then, perhaps, her presence would have averted the whole business. It was after the passengers had had coffee at Gander, he remembered, that he had grown tired of the large waiting-room.

"Would you like to go outside?" he said to Miss Olmstead. "I think we could get permission, and it's the last chance we'll have to walk on the North American continent for a while. At least, I hope it is."

"If it's all the same to you," she said, "I'd rather sit on the North American continent right here. I wish you'd put on your overcoat."

"Oh no," he said, "it isn't as cold as that. Watch it for me,

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will you?" And he put his overcoat down on the chair beside her.

"Come back soon," she said, "and tell me if you see an Eskimo or anything."

He knew the place rather well, and consequently he strolled aimlessly past some of the hangars, trying to remember how Gander had looked when he had seen it first, in wartime.

Of course he should have remembered his old lesson of never being too confident about anything, but then perhaps he had not entirely forgotten. Some planes were warming up in front of the hangars, and there would be no need for a silencer, he was thinking, on any gun at Gander. Living as he had, it was only natural that he should have developed an acute sense of apprehension. He had just come to the corner of a Nissen hut behind one of the hangars when he was aware that someone was behind him.

He was so certain of what was going to happen that he reached instinctively beneath his tweed jacket before he recalled that he had packed his gun in his suitcase because he did not believe in being armed aboard a plane. His right hand was still beneath his jacket as he turned to see a man behind him, dressed in a mechanic's overalls. The light was too dim to reveal much of his features. What was important was that he held a gun, and obviously had been bracing himself to shoot at the very instant that Jim Briscoe had made his turn; and Jim Briscoe's reaching for a weapon must have been disturbing. At any rate, even a good shot is apt to snatch at the trigger when startled.

It was a miss, and Jim Briscoe's mind was working by that time. First he let his right hand drop to his side, and then he let his knees buckle until he was on all fours and still sinking towards the ground. He doubted whether there would be a second shot if he gave the impression of being hit, and his line of thinking was right. The man stood for a second, watching him, and then he pocketed his pistol and ran.

Jim Briscoe was on his feet the same instant, sprinting in the opposite direction. It had been highly foolish of him to leave the waiting-room, and he returned as rapidly as possible.

Miss Olmstead must have been watching the door, because she waved to him as he entered.

"I'm awfully glad you're back," she said.

"So am I," Jim Briscoe told her. "Delighted."

"There wasn't much to see out there anyway, was there?" she asked.

The plane, with its transatlantic load of fuel, was so sluggish on the take-off that he sighed with relief when they were over the water.

There were several problems that he wanted to think out before he reached London. Nevertheless, he talked to Miss Olmstead for another forty minutes, until she said she was feeling sleepy. Then he called the stewardess, who gave her a pillow and a blanket. The bright lights had been turned down, and most of the passengers

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were asleep already, but Dr. Barnwelder was reading. When Jim Briscoe rose and walked down the aisle to the washroom, he stumbled, and steadied himself by putting his hand on Dr. Barnwelder's shoulder. There was no doubt that Dr. Barnwelder was not highly-strung. There was no galvanic tensing of the muscles, no guilty start, no irascibility or annoyance. Dr. Barnwelder simply looked up from his book, amiably, through his heavy rimless spectacles.

"I beg your pardon, sir," Jim Briscoe said.

"It is quite all right," Dr. Barnwelder answered, "quite all right."

A few minutes later Jim Briscoe walked to the bar compartment, and Jameson, the steward, smiled at him.

"Nightcap, sir?" he asked.

"Yes, please," Jim Briscoe said. "I could do with one."

They were alone, and their voices did not rise above the drumming of the engines. There was no reason why he should not be seen exchanging a few words with the bar steward.

"No news from Gander, sir," Jameson said.

"All right," Jim Briscoe answered. "I'm glad he was a nervous shot."

When he returned, he was glad to observe that Miss Olmstead was sound asleep. He wished he could be as far removed as she from the problems with which he was coping. He wished that circumstances permitted him to tap Dr. Barnwelder on the shoulder and offer him a friendly drink. There were a number of things he would have liked to tell Dr. Barnwelder, and Dr. Barnwelder might have been grateful if he could have heard them.

He would like to have told Dr. Barnwelder, for instance, that nothing was going to happen to him, because he was very valuable in many different ways. There was no such thing, he would like to have told Dr. Barnwelder, as complete security in the realms of science and invention. There was no secret Dr. Barnwelder knew that was immediately vital. If Dr. Barnwelder could only be apprised of this, how much easier everything would have been for everybody.

If Jim Briscoe could only have said, in a friendly way, "Listen, we don't care a bit about any of the things you are going to tell. If we did, you wouldn't be crossing the Atlantic now. But we want you back safe and sound and comfortable. All we want to know is with whom you are going to get into communication when you get to London. Is it a man named Bjor, who goes under the cover name Max Blenheim? That's all we want to know, and if you would only tell us, it would save a lot of trouble. We'll be delighted to let you tell Bjor anything you want to. All we want to know is, do you and Bjor link together?"

It was too bad that the thing should be difficult. The main problem at the present time was to disturb absolutely nothing. Instead of breaking up a spy ring, it was far more valuable to know all about it and let it be. There was nothing, as Jim Briscoe's old chief used

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to say, so useful as a well-established, confident spy ring, every link of which one knew.

It was exasperating to think how delicate the balance was in the Barnwelder-Bjor affair, and how quickly a single wrong move would explode the whole situation. On the one hand, those involved could not have known how far the investigation had gone or Dr. Barnwelder would never have been flying to London. On the other hand, they knew that something was happening or a bullet would not have whizzed past Jim Briscoe's ear at Gander.

They must have understood the risks they had taken with that shot at Gander.

Fortunately this contingency had been reviewed in Washington on the grounds that one had to be prepared for all such contingencies. Fortunately there was another cover for Jim Briscoe. If he was suspected, as he obviously had been, he had another mission, with the papers all prepared.

Jim Briscoe lifted his briefcase from beneath his feet and opened it with cautious fussiness. Then he looked around suspiciously, to warn anyone who might be watching him. Finally he produced a razor blade, split the heavy leather cover of the briefcase, and pulled out two sheets of folded flimsy paper, which he thrust self-consciously into his breast pocket. He replaced the briefcase beneath his seat and, after a few minutes, pulled the papers from his coat. They were headed " Most Secret " and contained suggestions for a revised liaison between certain British and American Intelligence divisions.

Jim Briscoe read the papers for half an hour and then returned them to their place in the split side of the briefcase and fussed with the edge of the leather to conceal the opening. Feeling that he had done all he could in the circumstances, he took a sleeping-pill.

The stewardess awakened him when the plane was letting down for Shannon. He shook his head and yawned and reached for his briefcase. Someone had been at the edge of it . . .

A great weight was lifted from Jim Briscoe when the plane taxied to a stop at London Airport. He felt as he remembered feeling as a boy, at home in the attic on a rainy day, standing dry and safe, and listening to the rain beating on the roof. It was wonderful to know the papers had been read; it was unfortunate, of course, that he had not spotted who had read them, but one could not do everything. Already he had a feeling of being safer than he had been for many hours. The pressure was gone, and he no longer had the sensation of being watched. From now on his British opposite numbers would take over the problem of Dr. Barnwelder.

He could see his opposite number, Mark Cheltman, at the passport control. Good old Mark, he was thinking. Though Mark looked thin and rather anæmic, he was an almost perfect street fighter.

He watched Dr. Barnwelder move towards the counter. He thought his step was brisker and more youthful than it had been at Idlewild, and Dr. Barnwelder did not seem to be having as much

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trouble with his briefcase and his overnight satchel. Jim Briscoe had a thought that the relief he experienced was being shared by Dr. Barnwelder.

Jim Briscoe turned to Miss Olmstead. It occurred to him, as things had developed, that he would have much more time on his hands than he had expected. In fact, except for a daily call at a building in the vicinity of Piccadilly, there would be nothing for him to do except to behave like the amiable playboy he represented.

" I don't know how well you know London," he said to the girl, " but if I can be of any help to you, please let me know. I've been here a good deal myself, and you can always find me at my hotel. If you have nothing better to do, I could take you out to dinner, and we might do a little night-clubbing."

" I'd love to," Miss Olmstead said. " It's awfully kind of you. I've only been in London for a day or two with Father on the way to Switzerland. What about tonight? I'm staying at the Norroy."

" Good," Jim Briscoe said. " Suppose I come for you at eight."

They called his name, and he held out his hand. Her handclasp was firm and strong. Their eyes met, and they both smiled.

In the last few years Jim Briscoe had developed a warm affection for Sir Godfrey's book-lined offices off Piccadilly. He had secretly been highly gratified when Sir Godfrey himself, who was the head of the division, and sometimes facetiously called Sir God by the younger men, had once told him that he showed promise.

The office lift as usual was out of order.

" It's been out of order for the last eight months," Mark Cheltman said. " No spare parts, you know, because of its antiquity. Besides, Sir God says that stair-climbing is good for wind and limb. I say, you *are* in good condition, aren't you? "

" I can still run just as fast as we did up those stairs in Damascus," Jim Briscoe said, " and that was really running."

" Yes," Mark said, " that was a good show, but one needn't run so fast right now, need one? "

Sir Godfrey was in his office, and the whole thing closely resembled an Agatha Christie, but then Agatha Christie may well have seen many places like Sir Godfrey's office. Sir Godfrey's close-clipped moustache was grey, and so was his carefully combed hair. He still had the upright bearing of a former Sandhurst man. He had been hit in the leg at Vimy Ridge in World War I, but his limp was hardly noticeable as he walked round the desk and shook hands with Jim Briscoe.

" What are you carrying wrapped up in paper? " Sir Godfrey asked.

" My briefcase, sir," Jim Briscoe said. " I think it ought to be tested for fingerprints."

" Mark, give it to Hawkins," Sir Godfrey said. " Did you have a pleasant crossing, Briscoe? "

" It wasn't so bad, sir," Jim Briscoe said, " but there was a bit of a flap at Gander."

" Well, sit down," Sir Godfrey said, " and let me fill my pipe."

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Jim Briscoe was so familiar with the technique of making a concise but accurate verbal report that he was able, while he was speaking, to admire the care with which Sir Godfrey followed every word. You could see everything in his mind come together as he listened. He smoked for fully half a minute after Jim Briscoe had finished, but his silence was not embarrassing.

"A pity, isn't it, that they spotted you," Sir Godfrey said. "I gather you were picked out by someone on the plane?"

"Yes, sir," Jim Briscoe answered. "I-believe that's how it was, considering everything."

"Yet you were not aware of anything?" Sir Godfrey said.

"Not until the last few seconds," Jim Briscoe said, "and then it was only instinct."

"Instinct does save lives," Sir Godfrey said. "That bit about the briefcase was rather good. Whoever the chap was, he managed things very neatly."

"Yes, sir, I noticed," Jim Briscoe said.

Sir Godfrey nodded and their eyes met. "A very artistic job. You didn't notice anyone on the plane?"

"No, sir," Jim Briscoe said, "and the passengers were screened before we left."

"Ask them to check the list, will you, Cheltman?" Sir Godfrey said. "Ah, here comes Hawkins again."

"Well, who was it, Hawkins? Barnwelder?"

"No, sir," Hawkins answered, "it's nowhere in our files."

"Would you care to venture a guess whether it was a man's or a woman's?"

"There's too little left for any conclusion, Sir Godfrey," Hawkins said.

"I suppose so," Sir Godfrey answered. "Well, thank you, and send a print to Washington at once, won't you, Hawkins?"

After Hawkins had gone and the door was closed, Sir Godfrey drummed his fingers softly on the desk.

"I think on the whole it was a good show, Briscoe," he said. "Where do you suggest we go from here?"

"Well, sir," Jim Briscoe said, "it looks as though they might be reassured, but your people will have to take over from now on, Sir Godfrey."

There was another silence, and Sir Godfrey looked worried.

"Barnwelder's being covered, of course," he said, "but this chap he may get in contact with, that's the difficulty."

"I'm afraid I don't quite follow you, sir," Jim Briscoe said.

Sir Godfrey sighed.

"I gather the reason we are all here," he said, "is because you people in Washington have a feeling that the man travelling under the name Max Blenheim is an important scientist named Bjor."

"Yes," Jim Briscoe said, "and I'm sure you follow our line of reasoning, sir. If Barnwelder is delivering information, obviously the only person capable of understanding it would be Bjor."

Sir Godfrey nodded and sighed again. "Naturally, we have

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quite a bit in the files about the fellow," he said. "He seems to be most retiring. They never put him into the game except at a big moment, do they? I understand that Bjor has been pointed out to you and that you can recognize him."

"Yes, sir," Jim Briscoe said. "I have seen him, and I admit he is rather inconspicuous, but he's the only agent they have who can understand Barnwelder. He was pointed out to me at an International Conference at the end of the war."

"That's a way back," Sir Godfrey said. "You think you could recognize him still?"

"I don't forget people like Bjor," Jim Briscoe told him.

"I wish he hadn't been quite so retiring," Sir Godfrey said, "because you're the only one who can spot him as far as I know."

"Why, there's Hall in your office, Sir Godfrey," Jim Briscoe said. "Hall knows him better than I do. Hall saw Bjor when he was at Geneva two years ago."

"Yes," Sir Godfrey said, "that's just it. You see, Hall, poor chap, isn't here now. He disappeared last week. He was going to meet me here. He never came, no word, no sign."

"They got him, did they?" Jim Briscoe said.

"I fear so," Sir Godfrey answered. "Alive, too, I suspect. Frankly, between us three, I've been somewhat worried about Hall's time reactions. They were too slow for a man of his age. I'm very much afraid they will make him talk."

Jim Briscoe nodded. It was ridiculous to think that anyone could remain silent in certain circumstances.

"Poor Hall," Sir Godfrey said. "There's only one consolation; I'm almost certain that he never knew you knew Bjor. I suppose we ought to face the future. We'll cover Barnwelder, Briscoe, but when he comes in contact with someone we think is Bjor, you'll have to be with us to make the identification."

"You'd better save me until the last moment, then," Jim Briscoe said. "The chief wanted me to say especially that we are counting on not upsetting their apparatus."

"Oh quite," Sir Godfrey said. "And now may I suggest you go to your hotel? Enjoy yourself while you may, Briscoe. It's what I always tell my boys."

Jim Briscoe rose and picked up his raincoat. "It's occurred to me," he said, "that Barnwelder may never have met Bjor himself. It may be complicated for them to get together. I have a hunch sir, where they may meet. It might be well to watch the Reading Room of the British Museum."

"Good gracious, why that?" Sir Godfrey said.

"Bjor was seen there once before the war," Jim Briscoe said. "It's a sort of shrine, you know, for these people. If you remember, Marx and then Lenin used to work in the Reading Room of the British Museum."

When Mark Cheltman left him at his hotel an hour later, Jim Briscoe again felt that a weight was lifted from him. There was nothing for him to do until tomorrow morning, when he must make

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his routine call at the offices off Piccadilly. Except for one final moment, the British would be responsible for everything. Jim Briscoe felt almost lonely, until he picked up the telephone from the rosewood writing-desk in his sitting-room and asked for Miss Edith Olmstead at the Norroy Hotel.

"Hullo," Miss Olmstead said. "I was hoping you were going to call me."

"I hope you can come to dinner tonight and dance afterwards," he said.

"Oh, I'd love to," she told him. "Do please come over as soon as you can."

The thing to do, Jim Briscoe told himself several times that evening, was to live entirely in the present. Edith Olmstead danced beautifully and he had always been fond of dancing. He was glad that he had discarded the idea of carrying a gun, because he could not have done the more complicated steps.

Considerably before midnight she said she would like to see St. Paul's at night.

The street lights picked out the devastation of the City, and he thought of the Temple and the old streets as he had seen them as a boy. They would never be like that again. His caution told him that it was not wise to linger in the vicinity of weed-grown cellar holes, but he still had no premonition of danger. He was sure that he was in the clear that night.

"Oh dear, it's lovely, but I suppose I should be getting home," Edith Olmstead said.

In the Strand, the lights of the Norroy, after St. Paul's, seemed unnaturally bright and garish.

"Well," he said, and he held out his hand. "It's been a wonderful evening, Edith. You've saved me from being very lonely."

"Oh, don't go away just yet," she said. "Wouldn't you like to come up and talk a while, at least long enough to help me stop thinking about St. Paul's?"

It was curious to find that his inclinations could struggle so intensely with his common sense. His training suggested that it was not the thing to do at all, to go up to a strange hotel suite with a girl you had picked up on a transatlantic plane, but suddenly he did not care in the least.

"Why thanks," he said. "I'd like to very much."

He had guessed correctly that she would have one of the small suites overlooking the river. He followed her through the narrow hall into the sitting-room with only a single sharp glance at the closed bedroom door.

Instead of switching on the lights, she stood beside him in front of the broad window that faced the Embankment. The darkness of the room made him momentarily tense until she put her hand on his arm. They leaned out to look over London, and he thought again how pretty she was.

"Let's sit in the dark for a while and look at the river," she said.

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Professionally, he wished he could examine the room first, and then he felt ashamed of the thought. He put his hand over hers; the faint light from outside showed her face turned up towards him.

"Yes," he said, "it's nice here in the dark."

There had only been a few times since his childhood that Jim Briscoe could call wholly happy. For example, there were not many good reasons for being happy those few days in London. The whole Barnwelder theory had started as his idea, and he could not avoid believing that his reputation depended upon the exactness of his guessing. Yet now and then, after that evening at the Norroy, he found himself forgetting the problem. At first this disturbed him, because he had learnt the importance of never forgetting if one wished to stay alive. Also it made him uneasy that any person could have such an effect on him.

He knew, of course, that an immunity to women was vital in his business. It was easy to tell himself that he could take the charm of Edith Olmstead, or leave it alone, as easily as he could decline a drink, but there had been several times in those days when he had entirely forgotten that women were the most dangerous elements in Intelligence. Until the case broke, he had been happier in London than he had been for a long while, but it all became a memory when he learnt that he had been right about the British Museum.

Sir Godfrey had told him the news three days later.

"Well," he said, "our Doctor Barnwelder has formed a pattern. Odd, isn't it, how human beings form routines, even if they stay in one place for only a day or so? Barnwelder has taken out a ticket for the Reading Room of the Museum. He was there yesterday morning, and he is there again this minute. It was intelligent of you to have made that suggestion, Briscoe."

Of course there was nothing more natural than for a man of Dr. Barnwelder's calibre to use the British Museum Reading Room during his stay in London. Still, Jim Briscoe was pleased with his guessing. For a second he felt the angler's elation at a fish striking at exactly the spot in the pool where he had guessed it would. Barnwelder was running with the line. It was only necessary now to be patient and very careful.

"What about the book boy, do you call him?" Briscoe asked.

"The attendant is one of our chaps—very keen."

"Of course you're checking all the ticket-holders?" he said. "And the Reading-Room people have the description I gave you of Bjor?"

"Naturally," Sir Godfrey said. "Naturally, and every book that Barnwelder takes is examined. I think we've covered everything. Have you any other suggestions, Briscoe?"

"I don't want to seem to be butting in, Sir Godfrey," Jim Briscoe said, "but I have been giving Barnwelder a good deal of thought in the last few months."

"Butt in by all means," Sir Godfrey said. "I'm always open to ideas."

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"Then I'd watch the titles of the books he reads rather carefully," Jim Briscoe said, "to see whether they have any sort of relationship; and if he calls for more than one volume at a time, I'd watch the way he piles them on the table. You see, I don't think he has ever met his man. He may need to make some sort of recognition signal."

He had been right again, and he never forgot that Sir Godfrey gave him the credit. It was the books on the table and the sequence of the titles that finally told the story.

Dr. Barnwelder moved slowly, but Jim Briscoe had learnt that deliberation was a facet of Barnwelder's character. It was ten days after that conversation with Sir Godfrey that the case broke. Jim Briscoe remembered the exact hour. His telephone on the rosewood desk in his hotel suite rang at half past eight.

"Your suit will be ready this morning," a voice said. "May I suggest a preliminary fitting in about half an hour?"

Briscoe was at Sir Godfrey's office fifteen minutes later, and for once the office had a festive air.

There seemed very little doubt that they had run down Bjor at last. A man with the name of Max Blenheim had applied for a ticket only the day before. He had appeared in the Reading Room in the early part of the afternoon. He had ordered four books, and had piled them eccentrically in front of him, but Dr. Barnwelder had not been in the Reading Room that afternoon.

"But he'll be there at ten this morning," Cheltman said. "He's as regular as clockwork. We'd better be starting now."

"We'll put you up in the gallery of the Reading Room among the bookstacks, my dear boy," Sir Godfrey said. "All we need is your identification."

Mark Cheltman went ahead of him that morning because there was every reason to be careful, and Jim Briscoe picked up a taxi in the Strand.

When he reached the Museum, he did not need to look at the lighted floor plan. The Reading Room, he knew, was straight ahead, but he did not obey his impulse to stride purposefully in that direction. He had learnt long ago that any unusual action on the part of anyone was always remembered in some quarter. He would be well ahead of Dr. Barnwelder if the doctor kept to his schedule, but he could not tell who else might be there, including some of the sharpest minds in the business.

There must be no trace of haste, nor too great an emphasis on purpose. He was the rich young American named Briscoe, knowledgeable and interested in the fine arts. His crepe-soled shoes, which had been carefully tested for noise, were slightly garish and incongruous.

On entering the Museum he had taken off his grey hat, and his face glowed with respectful interest. He paused for an instant and gazed up at the capitals of the stone columns, because strangers entering a building often gaze upwards as though afraid the roof might fall in.

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When he thought he had gaped long enough, he walked slowly in the direction of the Reading Room like a tourist testing old recollections and reluctant to ask the way of an attendant.

There were only a few people about, all of whom, in his respectful enthusiasm at being there, he appeared not to notice. His ability to spot people off the beat was naturally above the average. Except for two men, obviously planted by Sir Godfrey, both dressed in attendants' uniforms, Jim Briscoe could observe nothing out of the ordinary. He walked straight across the stone floor of the foyer and coughed gently so that the silence of his footsteps would not be too conspicuous.

A frail elderly man in a black alpaca coat was waiting for him. As Jim Briscoe approached the Reading Room, the old man moved arthritically along a corridor to the right, and a minute later Jim Briscoe found himself up in the gallery among the bookstacks.

He was pleased to observe that the elderly man also wore crepe soles. They both moved noiselessly into position behind one of the doors fronted by false backs of books that opened on the first gallery. Sir Godfrey's office could not have chosen a better observation point. A small opening had been cut in the door; it gave Jim Briscoe a good view of the readers' tables in the room below.

Although the sight was peaceful, Jim Briscoe felt a surge of excitement. He remembered the huge rotunda and the starlike arrangement of the reading-desks, which spread from the catalogue and reference desks in the centre. The room where Marx and Lenin had once sat was filled already with readers.

As he looked down, he was searching for one man—and one man only—in the vast Reading Room, but once he spotted him all other faces blurred to insignificance. There was no possible doubt as to the identification.

Bjor was seated, almost opposite, at a table across the rotunda. He looked older, but not much older. There was not much grey in his hair. It was thinner at the temples. There was the same concavity, the same high cheekbones and narrow jaw. There was no mistaking the nose and the delicate hands.

Jim Briscoe was annoyed that his heart was beating faster. He looked at his watch. There were still five minutes to go before Dr. Barnwelder was due to appear. As a matter of fact, Barnwelder was three minutes late, and Jim Briscoe, standing frozen, hardly daring to blink, remembered thinking that he would have done the same if he had been Barnwelder. There was nothing more suspicious than completely clockwork precision.

Dr. Barnwelder seated himself opposite Bjor, but as far as Jim Briscoe could see, neither of the men displayed the slightest sign of recognition. Dr. Barnwelder was obviously waiting for the books he had ordered, and the wait, before the attendant finally appeared with four volumes, seemed to Jim Briscoe interminable.

"Thank you," Dr. Barnwelder said, so distinctly and loudly that his voice carried to Jim Briscoe in the gallery.

Jim Briscoe remembered thinking again that Dr. Barnwelder

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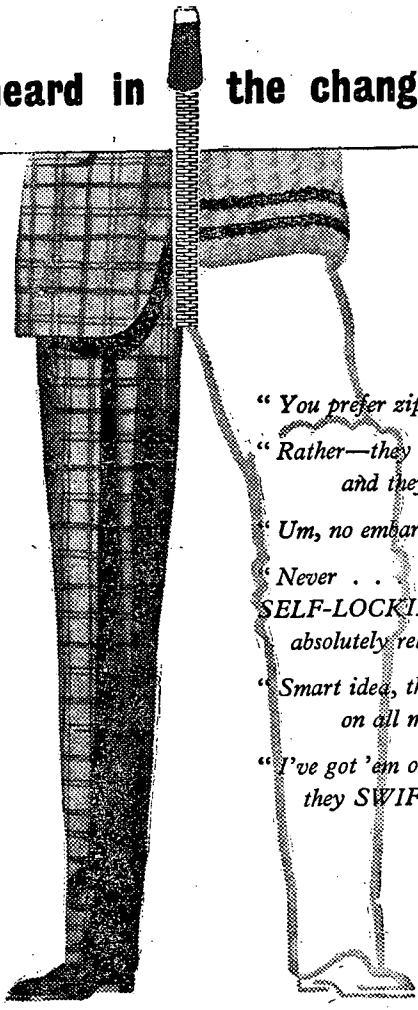
overheard in the changing rooms



"You prefer zips I see."

"Rather—they keep trousers in good shape and they fasten securely."

"Um, no embarrassing moments, eh?"

"Never . . . the SWIFT is a special SELF-LOCKING fly fastener and is absolutely reliable. Just look. . . ."

"Smart idea, that. Must see that they're on all my suits in future."

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had a pleasant voice. It seemed to him that the voice was unnecessarily loud, but Bjor did not look up. Dr. Barnwelder placed three of the books in front of him, with the backs arranged so that anyone opposite could easily read the titles. It made no difference what the titles were. The code itself was unimportant.

They were both excellent at what they were doing down there in the Reading Room. It was five minutes before Bjor looked at Dr. Barnwelder's books, and five minutes later before Dr. Barnwelder glanced up from the volume he was reading.

It was so well done that Jim Briscoe could believe that Barnwelder's glance met Bjor's by accident—but of course it was not accident. The two men had made contact. The ring was closed, and every detail of the Barnwelder theory was proved in that one second. Jim Briscoe had done what he had crossed the Atlantic to do, and it was time for him to leave the place as casually and unhurriedly as he had come. The old man was standing in the bookstacks near him. Jim Briscoe nodded to him slowly, and the old man nodded back.

A couple of minutes later Jim Briscoe was in the entrance hall and halfway towards the doors when he saw a girl in a tailored suit standing close to one of the pillars. It was Edith Olmstead, and she had recognized him before he could move a muscle.

"Why, Jim darling," she said, "I thought you said that you always slept late in the morning. Whatever are you doing here?"

Jim Briscoe did not need to ask her the same question, because he had seen the astonished half opening of her lips and the momentary dilation of her eyes. He hoped that his face showed nothing, and that his smile was natural. Actually, his surprise was very deep indeed, the deeper because he had discounted her. This made him so surprised and so ashamed of himself that for a second or so his thoughts were confused with emotion, because it was a long time since he had been so completely deceived in estimating a personality or a situation.

Now he saw that right from the beginning she had been detailed to keep watch over Barnwelder. She was on guard this minute to be sure that no one had observed the meeting in the Reading Room, and now she had seen him.

He could not avoid a moment's deep respect for her, of the sort that one skilled professional always accords to another. She had been caught off guard herself, he was thinking, because she had been deceived, too, by the false papers in his briefcase. That explained her surprise. They had both been mistaken.

All these thoughts ran through Jim Briscoe's mind as he walked towards her. The main thing, he was thinking, was to show no surprise or nervousness, because logic told him that she had no cause to believe that he had finally found her out. Why should she have, when she had deceived him for so long?

"Why," he said, "fancy seeing you here, of all people. But now you are here, I only have to make one guess what you're going to do."

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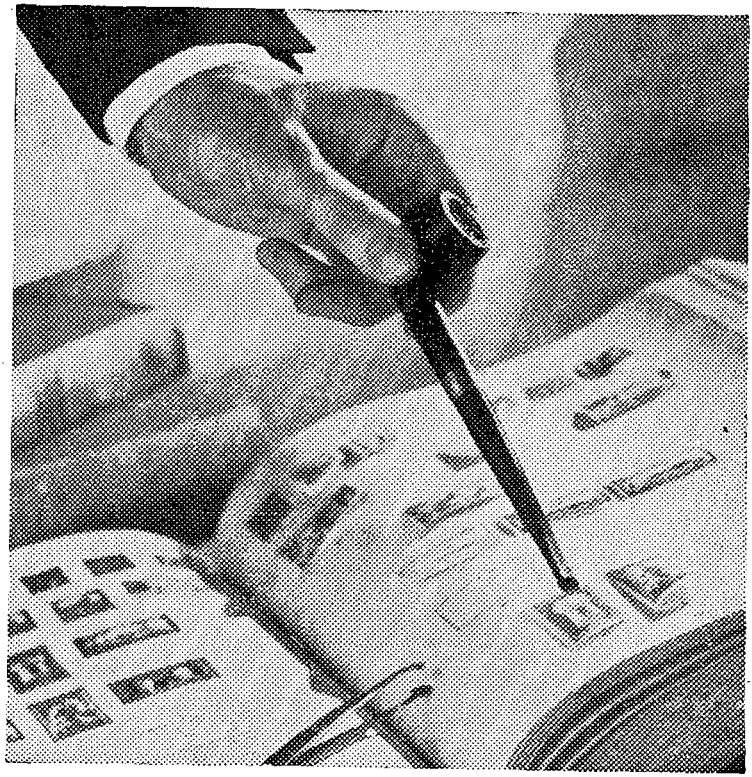

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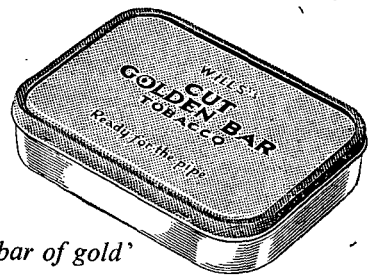

'Cut from a bar of gold'

WILLS'S CUT GOLDEN BAR CB9A

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His mind was moving more smoothly now that he was beginning to plan his immediate course of action. He could feel amused by the half-puzzled, half-watchful look behind her eyes.

"You always know all the answers, don't you?" she said. "Just in case I've forgotten, why don't you tell me what I'm going to do?" Her voice and manner still showed what good friends they had become.

"You're a very unkind girl, I think," he said. "You've been planning to sneak up here and look at the Elgin Marbles without me, or else you'd have told me last night."

"It just came over me this morning that I'd like to see the Elgins," she said. "Don't be so hard on me, darling. You sneaked up here yourself, didn't you?"

"It's an old bad habit of mine. I've always loved this place," he answered. "Let's go and see the Elgins."

—The situation was very delicate. The British ought to be informed, but there was no way to do it. The two men from the office had disappeared. The whole net had obviously been lifted at almost the same instant he had left the Reading Room. Then he saw she was laughing, and she seemed honestly amused.

"What's so funny?" he asked.

Before she answered, she linked her arm with his and pressed it possessively against her, and Jim Briscoe could read the thought behind that gesture. As far as she knew, he was the only one who had observed that meeting in the Reading Room. Obviously she was not going to let him go until something could be done about him. He hoped she did not know that he felt nearly the same way about her. If she gave a single word of warning, the whole combination would be spoilt. Everything must be kept quiet as long as possible. He knew their minds were as one about that.

"I suppose these were all put in some safe place during the war?" she said. The horsemen of Phidias had never seemed to him to be so full of life as they were that morning. He wished for one mad moment that he could be a professor of fine arts.

"Oh yes," he said, "they were kept underground."

Her arm was still linked with his. He was doing his best, of course, to think what he would do if he were she. There was only one main fact. She would be planning to get him out of the way eventually, and meanwhile he was reasonably sure that she did not suspect what he knew about her. He knew that she had been shocked when she saw him, because she had been deceived by the briefcase, but he was reasonably sure that she still thought of him as a gullible person as far as she was concerned.

They inspected the Elgin Marbles very carefully and very intelligently too, because neither wished to reveal absent-mindedness or desire for haste. Her enthusiasm for those reliefs did not seem in the least artificial. He was sure that she had a genuine love for line and shadow, and he found himself speaking to her about Greek sculpture, mentioning some of his old favourites. As he heard his own words, he was able to admire their validity. He

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wished to heaven that he had a gun now that he was aware again of clear and present danger.

He was glad to recall that quickness of hand and eye had been very helpful to him on a number of occasions, now that there was little doubt that he would have to avail himself of his skill in the very near future. After all, you could not go on looking at something indefinitely, even the Elgin Marbles.

Jim Briscoe sighed. "I wish we could stay here all day," he said, "but I don't suppose we can."

"I don't suppose so, either," she said. "What time is it?"

He thought her voice sounded sharper when she asked the time. It was a quarter past eleven.

"We could go back to my hotel," she said, "and have a drink upstairs, and talk until we're hungry." She stopped and smiled at him. "Or have you seen too much of the Norroy lately?"

"I'll never see too much of it, my dear. Never," he said.

They walked out of the Museum and stood on the kerb of Bloomsbury Street. A cruising taxi rolled past them.

"Why, Jim," she said, and her voice was as sharp as though they really were a married couple, "didn't you see that taxi?" She would have done better not to have made the remark. Stupid as she may have considered him, she could hardly blame him for being discriminating about taxi-cabs.

"I was going to take one from the rank round the corner," he said. "It seems fairer, don't you think?"

"Of course it does," she said. "I don't know why it didn't cross my mind."

She undoubtedly had a number of things to think about, and so had he. She reached for his hand and held it tightly as their taxi moved off.

"Darling," she said, "I've never had such a good time in London as I've had for the last few days. Do you think you can guess why?"

"It's funny," Jim Briscoe said, "how great minds think alike. No one could have had a better time than I've been having."

He was trying, as he spoke, to get the layout of her hotel suite clearly in his mind. She was so obviously relieved to be going there with him that there could not be much doubt that she had help available. Someone standing at the bedroom window, he remembered, could see a considerable distance into the rest of the suite. Someone might risk a shot at him from the bedroom, but no one could very well be there when they arrived, and on the whole he discounted the idea of shooting. Whatever was going to occur would necessarily be quiet. It might be a knife, except that knifing was messy in a place like the Norroy.

It was strange to be weighing these possibilities while he was holding her hand. It was strange that he could feel a genuine affection for her and a true admiration—but then, he could understand better than anyone else the difficulties under which she was labouring. He was aware more keenly than he had ever been before of her

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buoyant love of life. When they reached the desk at the hotel, he was sure that she had given no signal to anyone.

" We could either have luncheon served upstairs," she said, " or go out somewhere."

" Oh no," he said. " Upstairs by all means."

Inadvertently she had given him a useful piece of information. She had as good as told him that whatever the show might be, it would occur before lunch, not after. He was still turning this over in his mind while she waited for her key at the desk. His nerves must have been more on edge than he realized, because she startled him when the suite door closed behind them. They were still in the narrow hall when she turned and faced him.

" Darling," she said, " how about a kiss? I've been dying for one all morning."

Once again his mind returned to the advice Mr. Henry had given him in one of his first talks when Jim had joined the Bureau. Believe it or not, Mr. Henry had said, getting out of a bath in a strange hotel was a very dangerous procedure, and kissing a woman was almost its equal. You were vulnerable when a woman had her arms round you. She could be holding a knife, a small firearm, or a hypodermic. If she was strong and knew ju-jutsu, she could always knock you over. Nevertheless, Jim Briscoe spoke promptly.

" Two minds, dear, but a single thought. Two hearts that beat as one. Let me take your bag. You've never looked so beautiful."

She made no objection when he placed her handbag carefully on the console table. As it turned out, there was no guile in her embrace. It was a moment of generosity and defencelessness for both of them.

" Darling," she whispered, " I've loved you so."

If Jim Briscoe noticed the past tense, still he was sure she meant what she was saying. She was sorry, and he was sorry, too—much sorrier than he thought he would be that things had turned out like this for them. " Dear," he said, and he meant what he was saying, " it's not only been, but it still is wonderful."

She stirred gently in his arms. " You've always made me feel so natural, so completely at home," she said. " Jim darling, shall we have a drink? The Elgins have made me thirsty."

This was it then. In suggesting a drink she had as good as told him that it would be a waiter who would do the work. It would be a fractured skull or a Mickey Finn, and he was inclined to believe in the fracture, because it would be quicker.

" Now that you mention it," he said, and he hoped his glance was as friendly as hers, " I could do with a drink myself."

" Sit down, darling, and I'll give you a cigarette while I ring."

Her choice of chair for him showed academic judgment of the highest order. It was one of those low, deeply upholstered arm-chairs from which only a contortionist could rise rapidly. He gathered his feet beneath him and sat as near to the edge as possible, hoping she did not notice.

" We've had a lot of good times up here, haven't we? " she said.

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She was good—professionally at the top—he admitted, but not quite perfect or she would not have used the past tense again. He was pleased that his hand was steady when he lit her cigarette.

"I'm having a wonderful time right this minute," he told her. "Every moment with you has been wonderful." He drew his breath in slowly and told the truth. "It couldn't help but be, because *you're* wonderful." He was surprised to see her lips grow thin and the fresh colour leave her cheeks.

"You really mean that, Jim?" she asked.

"From the bottom of my heart."

It was an easy speech to make because it was absolutely true. She did not have time to answer before they heard the click of a passkey in the lock, and then he heard steps behind him, moving through the foyer. They were soft and deliberate footsteps, which indicated that the waiter was a big man. Her glance had left his. It was concentrated on a point above his head, which told him the height of the waiter's face. Just as he thought, the waiter was a big man. After all, great physical strength was desirable if you wanted to get through with one of those jobs quickly. He let his hands rest gently on the arms of his chair. He sat relaxed. Everything inside him was tempted, but he did not follow her glance.

"Oh Robert," she said, and her voice sounded husky, "thank you for coming so soon. The gentleman would like a Scotch and a splash."

"Thank you, madam," Jim Briscoe heard the waiter say, and the voice, which sounded like that of a masseur in a Turkish bath, indicated that the man was just behind him. "And what will you have, if you please, madam?"

Without turning, Jim Briscoe could tell what was happening, because every noiseless move the man behind him made was reflected in Edith Olmstead's face. Her lips had compressed, and her eyes had narrowed. It would not be a gun or a knife; it would either be garrotting or a blackjack. He was willing to bet on the blackjack, because the technique was simpler, considering the yielding upholstery of his low chair.

"Oh don't!" she screamed suddenly. "Look out, Jim!"

Actually he had timed the thing correctly in his own mind. He had jerked his body sideways and over the arm of the chair just as the blow came down. He was off his knees and in a crouch before the man recovered. Jim Briscoe had always prided himself on being good at close work, and his co-ordination was excellent. There must be no noise and no mess, he told himself, because the situation was very delicate.

As he thought, the waiter was a big man holding a blackjack. Jim had a glimpse of his dress suit and a red, contorted face. The blackjack was half raised for a second try when Jim Briscoe struck the man in the groin. When the man's body bent forward, Jim Briscoe had the opportunity to draw himself erect and whirl accurately on the ball of his left foot. The heavy neck just above the collar presented exactly the target he wanted. With all his weight

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behind the blow, he hit with the edge of his right palm. It was a simple blow, but most effective when delivered correctly, and his timing had been perfect.

Jim Briscoe had struck the man's spinal column just below the point where it joined the skull, and he knew that the neck was broken. He could tell by the man's short, stertorous breathing as he lowered the body softly to the floor. It looked for a moment as though something further might be needed before the matter was completely finished, but in the end it was not necessary. His attention turned at once to the girl.

She had not moved. She had not risen from her chair, and he remembered thinking that she had missed a chance. He found himself dusting his hands together gently, an absurd, instinctive gesture. Her handbag was on a small table beside her. He swept it to the floor, beyond her reach.

"That's right," he said. "Sit quiet. Believe me, moving about won't do you a bit of good." He was glad she understood him. After all, they were both professionals, and they did not need to explain much to each other now the cards were on the table.

"I had to scream," she said. "I couldn't bear to have you killed."

"Don't let it worry you, my dear," he said. "The warning was unnecessary, but believe me, I am very grateful."

"Oh Jim," she whispered. Her face was very white. "It had to be you or me, didn't it? I never dreamt it would be you until I saw you there this morning."

Jim Briscoe nodded slowly, and then he found the packet of cigarettes and offered her one and lit it.

"I'm afraid it has to be you now," he said. "In a mild way, I hope. You understand that, don't you?"

She understood. It was a great relief that they were both professionals.

"Yes," she said. "I know—but if it is all the same, I'd much rather you didn't do it, Jim."

He had never liked her so much as when she made that request.

"You didn't mind so much, did you," he said, "when you let them have a shot at me at Gander?" He mentioned the whole thing lightly. She was frightened, but she fell in with his mood at once. She was a very high-class operator.

"No," she said, "but that was before I knew you." Her voice dropped almost to a whisper. "Please don't make the arrangements yourself, darling. Get someone else to do it."

He was grateful she felt like that. Besides, it was not his job.

"All right," he said, "then I'll use your telephone, my dear." And then his words were still soft but very cool. "Just smoke your cigarette quietly, and don't do anything else at all or I'll chop you down like that henchman of yours."

He felt awkward with the English telephone when he gave the number of the office and asked for Mark Cheltman.

"Hullo, Mark," he said. "I'm in a spot of trouble at the

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Norroy," and he gave the number of the suite. " I'm right as rain personally, but you'd better drop over at once with one or two chaps. It might interest Sir Godfrey to come if he isn't busy."

Jim Briscoe put down the telephone and prodded the body of Robert with his toe.

" I don't know what Sir Godfrey will have in mind," he said, " but you'll find he's a reasonable man."

She didn't answer.

" Listen," he told her, " you've upset the apple-cart, and all we can possibly do is buy a day or two now. No matter what is done about you, your people will get the wind up, but a day or two is something. You ought to tell yourself you've done quite well."

" Yes," she said. " Let's change the subject, shall we? " But it was no time to change the subject.

" Just take that look off your face," he said. " This is Britain. You're going to live, my dear. Nobody's even going to touch you."

" More fools you," she said.

" Yes," he said, " perhaps you're right. You might tell me, because we'll be bound to find out. Where is Miss Edith Olmstead? " The girl smiled at him, and she looked less tense.

" In Rome," she said. " I kept telling you I was going to visit friends in Rome, didn't I? She left the same day we did, but she left from Baltimore. All she had to do with this was to be leaving the country when I needed a cover story."

Jim Briscoe sighed, because one could not think of everything.

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" You people certainly know how to fake passports," he said.

" Yes," she said, " indeed we do."

He looked at her for a while without speaking. Her face looked harder, and the illusion of innocence was gone.

" Well," he said, " you certainly mixed things up for me. The boss always told us to keep away from gals."

" Jim," she said, " I want to ask you something."

" What? " he asked.

" Please don't hate me altogether. Please."

He did not have time to answer, because there was a knock at the door of the suite, and he remembered that the door was locked.

" Get up," he told her. " Walk ahead of me and open that door, and please do it without any tricks."

Sir Godfrey lit his pipe as soon as he seated himself to receive Jim Briscoe's report.

" Well," Sir Godfrey said, " I don't see what else you could have done in the circumstances, Briscoe. So he came in when she rang? "

" They work in pairs quite often, sir," Mark Cheltman said.

" Yes," Sir Godfrey said. " Things do so often upset the apple-cart, don't they? "

" It was my fault, sir," Jim Briscoe said, " for not having spotted her long before." Sir Godfrey shook his head slowly.

" No, no," he said. " I was not thinking of that point. One

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always thinks of what one should have done, doesn't one? Of course, I should have given orders for you to stay hidden in the Museum. Stupid of me, really."

"I wish I'd thought of that myself, sir," Jim Briscoe said.

"Well, well," Sir Godfrey said, "things aren't wholly spoilt for us. We'll be able to give them a bloody nose, I think, if she didn't communicate with anyone. We'll have some hours, a day or two perhaps. Start making things secure, Mark."

"Yes, sir," Mark Cheltman said. "We've begun already."

There was no doubt that the British had taken over, and Jim Briscoe was relieved, because reaction was setting in, making him feel drained and tired.

"Briscoe," Sir Godfrey said, "I assume your chief knows what to do in these circumstances."

"Yes, sir. All you need do is signal 'Second Situation.'"

"Then I think we have all the facts," Sir Godfrey said.

"Yes, sir," Jim Briscoe said. "I think I've told you all I know. I'm sorry things didn't work out better."

"On the whole, I think you did very well indeed," Sir Godfrey said. "But now I think the less you are seen about here the better, Briscoe. I'd leave at once. We'll take care of the young lady and handle the corpse, of course. Big chap, wasn't he?"

Mark Cheltman laughed gently. "Jim always had a way with waiters," he said. "Always."

"Mark," Sir Godfrey said, "get him on the V.I.P. flight tonight. Well, good-bye. It's a pleasure to have seen you again, Briscoe."

Jim Briscoe shook hands with Sir Godfrey and Mark Cheltman. He was wondering, while he did so, exactly what they would do with Edith Olmstead and how long they would keep her out of circulation. It would depend, of course, on what might turn up now that important arrests were certain to be made. It might be a long while before she took a plane to anywhere again. But that was not his problem. The worst of it was that he could say nothing to her—not a word of encouragement or of regret—in front of the men who watched them. The strange part about it was that he found himself regretting a good deal, without exactly knowing what. Still, the main thing was to live in the present.

"Chin up," he said. "Good-bye, Miss Olmstead. Believe me. I won't forget you. Ever."

"Nor I you," she said, and she smiled at him.

He wanted to shake hands with her, but that would have been absurd with the two men watching. When he turned on his heel and picked up his hat, he was reasonably sure that he would neither forget her nor see her again. He was even more sure when he closed the door of the suite behind him.

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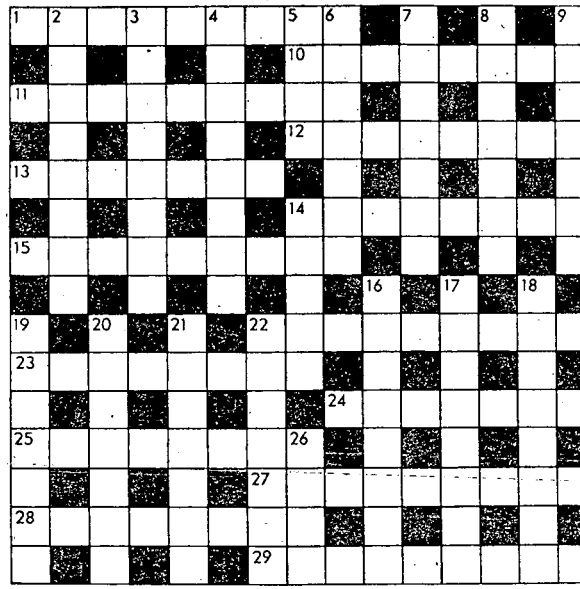
Solution on Page 67

★



CLUES

Across

1 Poise pots for contrast (9).

10 Description of the pitcher that went too often ? (4-4).

11 Perkin, Lambert, or Charlie (9).

12 Mature beside the loch (8).

13 Inferior accountant at sea ? (7).

14 Brings good luck on land, sea, or air (8).

15 When the oaf's confused with drink he sticks to us (9).

22 It's almost worth going after the offal (9).

23 14 across often goes for this (5, 3).

24 Canine turn-up (3-4).

25 Ada ill ? O.K. ! It's basic (8).

27 Suitable span for the Traitors' Gate ? (5, 4).

28 You can't go on the tiles on *this* roof (8).

29 Kerb feeling, maybe ? (4, 5).

Down

2 Art in pickle, almost (8).

3 Imperial mails ? (8).

4 Member of species found Abroad, and in Paris (8).

5 We're reformed—we take water now (4).

6 They go on and on sounding like breakfast foods (7).

7 That lady of song has lost colour (7).

8 An East European leads the argument (7).

9 An indirect speech (2, 5).

14 Take this instrument when off to see his etchings (5).

16 Bean in debt ? Just beaten off (8).

17 Ballet where the hero gets the bird (4, 4).

18 Three-way split on party lines (8).

19 Deep waters for those who are in them (7).

20 You'll find this stricken horse in hospital (4-3).

21 Opened by a minor key ? (3-4).

22 A match for the devil (7).

26 Nothing friezes Father ! (4).

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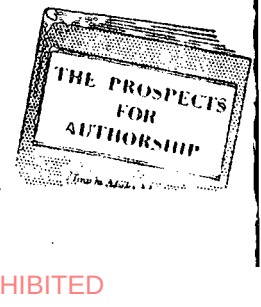
Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it. . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/267: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**; they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY-MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.



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